

AUSTIN POWERS MEETS ROBIN HOOD:

EXPLORING TEXTS THROUGH DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

This research project followed an ethnically and culturally diverse, sixth-grade classroom as they shared and constructed meaning from a selected text through a variety of drama activities. Unlike most studies on drama in the classroom, this research project examined the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and the influence this has on student engagement. This study is centered in sociocultural theory, the central premise of which describes human thought as constituted by and originating from language-based social interactions with others. This research project also addressed the concept of multiple literacies and how it applied to the extension of communication choices beyond that of just language. It included drama, film, video, computer technology, visual arts, and music. As traditional forms of reading, writing, and communicating take on new literary forms, students need to be prepared and encouraged to critically think about the information they are exploring, especially in the area of media literacy. Through participant observation, field notes, fieldwork journal entries, audio and video recording, and interviews, I analyzed the students' social learning experiences, and their use of a variety of literacies to enhance and extend the traditional methods of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“ The task of the teacher is a task that requires that those who commit themselves to teaching develop a certain love not only of others but also of the very process implied in teaching. It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up.” (Freire, 1998, p. 3)

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO A RESEARCHER’S JOURNEY

It has taken several years of personal and professional growth, but I am no longer afraid to admit that I am stumbling through this life the same as everyone else, learning as I go. I am learning as a woman, mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, and teacher. I began my career in teaching almost nine years ago and have come from learning how to teach, to asking myself why I teach the way I do. Before I received my teaching certificate, I had to complete an essay on my philosophy of education. I found that essay a few months ago and realized that it only represented a fraction of what I believe and know about teaching and learning today. One of the best things about a philosophy is that it is always evolving, especially as we grow personally and professionally.

My decision to enter the Master’s in Education program at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks was for both personal and professional reasons. After I received my teaching certificate, I decided to stay home with my children until my youngest one completed Kindergarten. I have never regretted that decision, however it meant that I would have to give up a full-time teaching job for several years. Volunteering in my

children's classrooms kept me very involved, but I needed to connect with other teachers and continue to grow professionally. My time in the Master's program has been both challenging and rewarding, and has helped me answer the questions about how and why I teach. It has also helped me answer the question of what kind of teacher I want to be.

One of the most significant benefits of this Master's program is that it has allowed me to commit fully to engaging in ongoing learning. I have had time to read, write, and reflect on what I am learning from professional literature and other educators. I have made lasting friendships with teachers throughout Alaska, and the support and encouragement that I have received from my graduate professors has been amazing.

As I moved closer to graduation, I began to wonder about the research I would do for my thesis. There were so many options that at first it seemed overwhelming. However, I eventually decided that I wanted to do research in an elementary classroom, and I wanted my research to focus on the relationship between multiple literacies and student engagement. Trying to find just the right classroom was going to be a challenge. As luck would have it, I found just the classroom I was looking for.

I found a sixth-grade classroom that was using drama as a means to explore texts. The students would read a text, watch several movies of the text, work together to write a script based on the text and movies, and then turn their script into a movie. This seemed like an ideal place to begin looking at multiple literacies, the social and cultural learning environment, and student engagement because the students in this class were (a) exploring a text in multiple ways in order to present their understanding and perspectives on the text, (b) working collaboratively to construct meaning and create an

environment where different perspectives are respected, (c) selecting tasks that interested them and were meaningful.

Once I had a focus for my research, I began an in-depth search for existing information on exploring texts through drama. I found an abundance of information on multiple literacies, engagement, sociocultural learning theory, multiple intelligences, and drama in the classroom. However, there was very little information available that specifically addressed having students explore a text through making a movie of it was limited. This lack of information inspired me even more to examine how drama was being used in this particular sixth-grade classroom.

The term “drama” can mean many different things to different individuals, and is often used with other terms such as “theater” and “acting”. The activities associated with drama can range from improvisational play to producing a play. A teacher’s level of involvement in drama activities will vary depending on the goals of the students and teacher. As a researcher, I was able to observe the students in this classroom participate in a drama cycle, which began with improvisational play and eventually ended with the students creating a movie. It was through their participation within this drama cycle that I observed them build a community in their classroom through a shared goal, which was to complete their movie.

There is a powerful space that is created in the classroom when drama is used to achieve a shared goal. Students are provided with opportunities to interact, imagine, and collaborate with each other in a safe learning environment. They can explore issues and role-play, which creates possibilities to consider different perspectives. According to

Cecily O'Neill (1995), through drama students are free to change their social position, adopt different roles and responsibilities, and play with different realities. Through drama, students are able to move beyond the everyday classroom activities and discover a space where they can consider multiple ways of knowing and different perspectives.

As I thought about all that was potentially going on in this classroom, I began to consider the following questions: How can drama be used in the classroom to help students create meaning together through shared experiences and consider different perspectives? How do students benefit from the use of multiple literacies in drama related activities? What is the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and student engagement?

These questions supported my decision to conduct research in a classroom that was heavily grounded in sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky (1978), sociocultural theory emphasizes social activity and cultural practice as sources of thinking, and that individuals are inseparable from their social contexts. It is my hope that this study, which focuses on exploring texts through drama, will have meaningful results that are of value to teachers looking for alternative ways to engage students with literature. Although there have been other studies that examine the use of drama in the classroom, this study focuses on how one sixth-grade drama project can engage students in (a) transferring meaning in multiple ways, (b) building classroom communities that value different perspectives, (c) allowing students to select tasks that appeal to them, and (d) creating an environment that encourages students to express and be themselves.

This ethnographic case study was conducted in an urban, culturally and ethnically diverse, sixth-grade classroom. It sought to explore the experiences of twenty-seven students as they read and constructed meaning from a text and various movies of the text, worked collaboratively to write their own script based on the text and movies, and turned their script into a movie, see Figure 1.

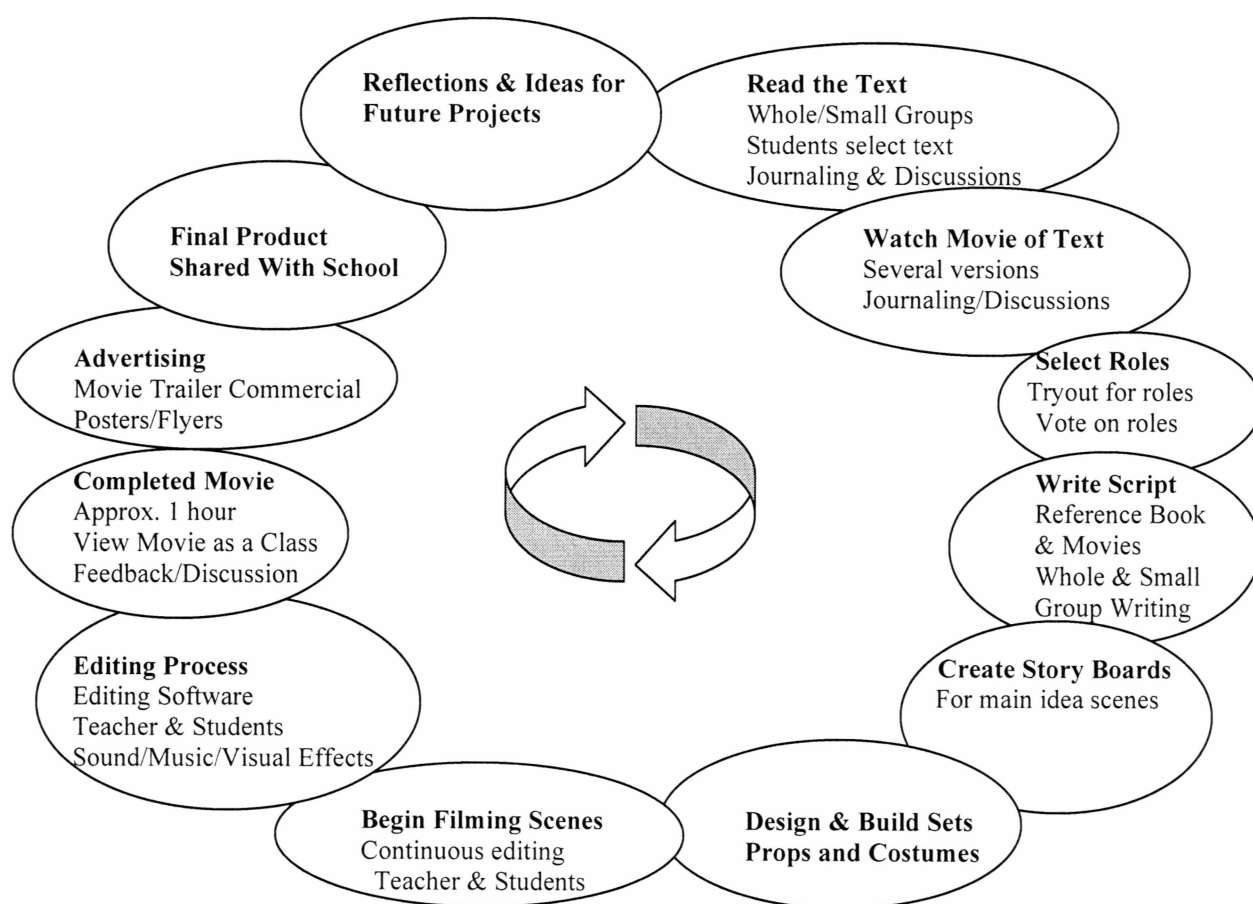


FIGURE 1: PROCESS OF EXPLORING TEXTS THROUGH DRAMA

This shows the process the students went through as they worked together to create their movie.

I assumed the role of a participant observer, which allowed me to collect data through in-depth observation while still being able to interact with the students. A participant observer is an observational role in which the researcher takes part in activities in the setting they observe, while still recording information (Creswell, 2005). I spent five days a week, approximately 2 hours a day, for one semester, collecting data through a variety of qualitative methods. I continually analyzed and reflected on data as it was being collected, which helped me structure future observations. Once the data had been collected, my time in the classroom came to an end and I spent the next several months conducting an in-depth analysis of observations, field notes, interview transcripts, and journal entries. When I looked at the data from a sociocultural framework, I realized that the students were motivated to work together to create a supportive and respectful learning community.

Gardner (1993) stresses that individuals need to be engaged in meaningful and relatively complex projects, which take place over time, are engaging and motivational, and lead to the development of understanding and skill. The students in this sixth-grade classroom participated in a project that involved (a) interaction with other students, (b) a teacher who helped them develop a vision, (c) students who helped one another accomplish a variety of project related tasks, (d) collaboration among students to contribute to the overall success, and (e) and eventually an audience that viewed the end product. The students' goal for the sixth-grade drama project was to have fun while the teacher's goal was to have the students develop a passion for literature, and build a classroom community where students respect multiple perspectives. Even though the

teacher and students had different goals, they were all motivated to achieve their goals. By the end of the movie project, the students realized that they had fun building new relationships, learned new skills, and worked together to create something that they could all be proud of. The teacher of this sixth-grade class realized that this movie project helped build a classroom community of respect, revealed students' hidden strengths, and enhanced students' passion for exploring texts in multiple ways.

1.2 CLASSROOM CONTEXT

The classroom environment reflected the teacher's belief that in order for students to be motivated to explore texts and have fun while doing it, they need to be in an environment that allows them to stretch their imaginations. This particular classroom environment had (a) a library area with comfortable chairs and pillows, (b) a blue velvet drape hung from the ceiling in the library area which was used as an improvisational stage, (c) a colorful puppet stage and puppets sat on a table in another corner of the room, (d) a mobile computer and video cart was along one of the walls, (e) a television and more computers were located along a wall in the front of the room, (f) an art center with a variety of art materials, fabrics, and props were located in a large cabinet in the back of the room, and (g) a blue cloth (which the class referred to as a "blue screen") stretched the length of the front room and was the backdrop for all the filming of the students' movie. The desks in the classroom were usually pushed together in the back of the room, so the students could do whole- or small-group work on the floor, or have class

discussions. During my time in the classroom, I rarely ever observed students working independently at their desks.

The environment of this classroom allowed the students to actively engage in drama in a cooperative and supportive learning space. It allowed student voices to be heard that are often times silenced out of fear of embarrassment. Students had opportunities to be creative and imaginative, and select tasks that appealed to them. They discovered that each of them had hidden talents, and they learned to appreciate and use those talents. Most importantly, they learned to appreciate each other's differences and value what each of them had to offer to the group.

There were some delimitations to this study that need to be mentioned. First, the participants in the study only included the students in one sixth-grade classroom, which means it was a small sample size. Second, the teacher in this classroom had extensive experience working with video-editing software. However, this is not necessarily a delimitation, because the computer technology that was used is something that could be learned by experimenting and working with the computer software. Third, the data collection process in a qualitative study is more subjective than a quantitative study, but this does not mean that the data is any less valid.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This chapter has established a framework for the research journey, outlined the background of the study, presented the questions that led to this study, and briefly explained the methodology that was used. Chapter Two provides an overview of the

literature that focuses on (a) how meaning is transferred from one sign system to another, (b) social and cultural aspects of the classroom, (c) engaging students in their own learning through multiple literacies, and (d) creating a space in the classroom for students to feel safe expressing themselves. Chapter Three explores the methodological framework for the study, which includes the research context, participants, data collection procedures, and analysis. Chapter Four presents the results of the ethnographic case study through observations and the students' voices. Chapter Five summarizes and discusses the meaning of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT EXISTING LITERATURE

I became interested in using drama to engage students with texts when I began helping in Mr. Wesley's class three years ago. I had just started working on my Master's Degree in Language and Literacy through the School of Education at the University of Alaska. I was also working on a K-12 (Kindergarten-Grade 12) Reading Endorsement through the School of Education. Both of these programs had a significant impact on my philosophy of education, and I began to understand and appreciate the power of teacher research.

Teachers are continually doing research in their classrooms as they observe, document, and analyze what their students are doing everyday. Based on the analysis of their observations, they formulate theories about what their students need and the best way to meet those needs. Teacher research also provides opportunities for teachers to be reflective about their practice and make adjustments when necessary.

Knowing how significant teacher research is to improved practice, I decided that the best way to understand the benefits of using drama to explore texts would be to be in the classroom observing and documenting the process. I had past experiences with Mr. Wesley's classes as they (a) selected a text as a class, (b) read the text in large and small groups, (c) watched movies of the text, (d) wrote a script for the text, (e) selected characters, (f) created props, costumes, and scenes, (g) acted out and filmed the script they had created, (h) used technology to edit, (i) added special features and sound effects

to their film, and (j) shared their final movie with the whole school. My previous experiences with this process is what inspired me to take an in-depth look at exploring texts through drama. I had observed other teachers use drama to explore texts, however I had never observed it done quite so extensively.

Using drama in the classroom is not a new concept, yet with so much emphasis being placed on standardized tests and meeting standards, incorporating drama into the classroom is not a priority for most teachers. It is important to recognize that using drama as a tool for exploring texts is an invaluable way to motivate students to engage with texts and an excellent way to extend learning across the curriculum. Exploring texts through drama provides students with opportunities to collaborate with others across subject areas and in multiple ways such as reading, writing, visual arts, music, film, dance, and technology. Providing students with multiple forms of expression typically increases their willingness to engage in their own learning.

Occasionally, teachers struggle to find ways to get their students to engage with texts, share their understandings with others, and consider different perspectives. Most teachers want to help their students think critically about what they are reading and be able to share their thinking with others. The literature I have read on drama in the classroom, social and cultural learning, and student engagement seems to support the following assumptions: (a) Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies will have a positive influence on student engagement, (b) when students socially construct meaning there are opportunities for them to consider multiple perspectives, and (c) learning becomes authentic and meaningful when a space is created in the classroom for

playful experiences. A review of the existing literature in the following areas will establish a framework for using drama to explore texts: (a) How transmediation across multiple sign systems helps create meaning, (b) reasons for creating environments that foster collaboration and cooperation, (c) why student ownership increases engagement in the learning process, (d) how using multiple literacies in the classroom benefits students, and (e) the importance of creating a space for students to express themselves through play.

2.2 TRANSMEDIATION IN THE CLASSROOM

As I watched the students continually refer to the *Robin Hood* book and movies as they wrote the script for their movie, I began to wonder about the connections they were making between the words on the page and the images on the television. Ladislaus Semali (2002) suggests that sometimes, consciously or even unconsciously, we all move from one sign system to another as we read or view, continually trying to understand the world around us. Signs can represent anything that stands for something else and can take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects (Chandler, 2002). The study of sign systems is commonly referred to as semiotics.

For the purposes of this literature review, I am not going to go into depth on the history of semiotics or the two individuals that are generally associated with the development of semiotic thought, Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure. Instead, I am going to focus on how meaning is made and translated within sign systems. This process is referred to as “transmediation”, and was first introduced by Charles Suhor

(1984) who defined the process as taking understandings created in one sign system and moving them into another sign system. Transmediation is a significant process for educators to understand, because it increases students' opportunities to engage in generative and reflective thinking as they invent connections between two sign systems; connections that may not have existed previously (Siegel, 1995).

If teachers want their students to engage in meaningful learning, then students must have opportunities to create their own meanings from texts and then share those meanings with others. Often, students are expected to read a text and then answer basic comprehension questions or complete a worksheet about what the author's meaning of the text was. According to Eisner (1994), there needs to be more diversification of meaning-making opportunities in the classroom; students need more opportunities to view and present, and teachers need to be motivated to include new sign systems in their teaching. Students need to move beyond simply doing an activity or presentation from a book, but instead use multiple sign systems as tools for thinking and presenting (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000).

When students are asked to read a book and then complete a book report or answer comprehension questions on a worksheet, their responses are typically word for word from the book. There is little need for the students to really think about their thoughts on the book. Rosenblatt (1978) argued that students need to share their aesthetic responses to a book, so they can attend to the feelings and connections they experience as they live within a book. This is why it is so important to make time to discuss a book as

it is being read. Students need time to read a section, internally process what they have read, and then share their thoughts and connections with others.

Short, Kauffman, and Kahn (2000) found that time of reflective analysis can involve students in thoughtful and productive transmediations across sign systems when they take their understandings from reading and consider them in another sign system. Having students read a book in small groups, discuss their understandings, and then present their understandings to the whole group is a great way to explore literature through transmediation. Siegal (1995) would agree that students transform their understandings through creating a connection, so that the content of one sign system is transferred onto the expression plane of another. Examples of an expression plane might include, but would not be limited to, an oral and/or written presentation, a play, a song, or a dance.

From a sign system perspective, literacy is defined as all the ways in which meaning is made and shared, including music, art, mathematics, movement, drama, and language (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). This broad definition of literacy creates opportunities for students to express their understandings in ways other than the traditional ways, such as, reading a book and answering basic comprehension questions. Embracing a broad definition of literacy allows students to express their understandings in a sign system that appeals to them. They can also express their understandings through multiple sign systems, which adds to the complexity of their thinking because each sign system offers a distinctive way of making meaning (Eisner, 1994). With so many

different ways of knowing and expressing meaning, students are exposed to multiple perspectives within the classroom.

Transmediation can expose students to multiple perspectives, which creates opportunities for in-depth thinking. When multiple sign systems are available, students have more possibilities to transfer their understandings and make connections. Multiple sign systems are therefore significant, because they create the foundation for creative and critical thought processes (Eco, 1976). As students read, create understanding, and connect with literature, it is especially important that they have opportunities to share their understanding in creative ways. Drama is one creative way for students to share their understandings of literature.

2.3 CREATING A COMMUNITY THROUGH DRAMA

There are a variety of terms for social learning and teaching that can be found in the literature, for example, socially grounded learning, social-cultural context of learning, social constructivist, social constructionist, and sociocognitive (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 1990; Delpit, 1995; Wertsch, 1991). For the purposes of this literature review, the term that will be used to describe the social and cultural environment of the classroom will be sociocultural learning. The concept of “social” is key to the work of Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), meaning is socially negotiated and mediated through multiple sign systems. Students use language to communicate their thoughts with others and as they engage in that process, their experiences begin to combine with the experiences of others, which eventually leads to the creation of new learning. Vygotsky

viewed this process as a “zone of proximal development (ZPD)”, which is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).

According to Vygotsky, instruction in the ZPD “calls to life in the child, awakens and puts in motion an entire series of internal processes of development. These processes and learning opportunities are only possible in the sphere of interaction with those surrounding the child and in collaboration with companions” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 71). Drama in the classroom creates opportunities for students to work with other students that are more skilled in particular areas. Based on the concept of ZPD, learning and teaching involve internal development processes that thrive in environments where children can interact with others and work cooperatively with peers (Wertsch, 1985).

When students interact with other students through discussions and collaborative activities they are constructing shared knowledge. Through participation in discussions, students acquire the language and genres that enhance their level of participation and their use of response strategies valued in different types of discussions (Galda & Beach, 2001). When students have opportunities to make connections with other students’ experiences and knowledge through drama, their overall learning is meaningful and enriched. Students may become interested or personally motivated, as well as intrigued, as they make connections and contrasts to other students’ stories through their own experiences (Morgan, 1997).

Evidence of learning as a social process becomes apparent when observations are made of students sharing thoughts about their favorite books, movies, games, and so on. The learning that occurs during these conversations is enormous and significant for both students. Gloria Kauffman (1996) discovered through research done in her own classroom, that group discussions help students learn to build on each others' comments and share personal opinions. It also showed that having the students share their connections kept them informed of new and differing perspectives on similar issues.

The use of drama in the classroom addresses not only social aspects, but cultural aspects as well. It is critical for educators to realize that individuals and their social and cultural worlds are embedded within each other (Moll, 2000). Gutierrez (2002) argues that, "educational practices are constituted through the junction of cultural artifacts, beliefs, values, and normative routines known as activity systems. In this way, classroom activity is a particularly important nexus for understanding cultural processes in that thinking and doing are linked in social practice." (p. 313) Based on this argument, an enormous amount of information about cultural practices can be determined by examining the classroom learning environment.

Students' responses to literature are constructed from both internal and external influences (Rosenblatt, 1978). Individual responses to literature are typically influenced by the intellectual tools with which responses are built; norms, values, and preoccupations of a reader's cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). For Wertsch (1991), an individual's activity is contextualized because it is shaped by cultural tools that mediate and transform mental actions into new ways of knowing and doing.

This means that the way individuals interact, either alone or in groups, is accomplished through their cultural tools. According to Wertsch, these tools may include computers, language, numbers, reading, writing, textbooks, maps, diagrams, or even the physical configuration of a classroom. Using drama in the classroom involves many different cultural tools such as language, reading, writing, texts, scripts, props, costumes, computers, video cameras, and set design and construction.

Wertsch (1998) contends that the difficulty of understanding social settings, such as the classroom, comes from the inability to view the setting in all its complexity. According to Wertsch, there exist tensions between individuals and the resources, or cultural tools, provided by their culture. This delicate relationship between individuals and their cultural tools, suggests that if a cultural tool or individual is changed, then there will be a change in action. For example, having students respond to text through whole-group instruction where the teacher is asking basic comprehension questions verses having students respond to a text through drama, where students are working in small groups and taking control of their own speech; the students are more likely to be engaged in the activity that gives them opportunities to collaborate and take ownership in their learning. Changing the tool through which the text is being explored has a significant impact on the students learning. One key feature of sociocultural theory is that learning occurs through participation in a joint, collective activity mediated by cultural tools (Wertsch, 1998). Through drama, cultural tools such as, visual arts, technology, or language, provide opportunities for students to share their responses within their classroom community.

Accepting the idea that intellectual activity is happening more than just inside the mind of the individual is an important aspect of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). An individual's thinking, is always influenced by cultural aspects and interactions with others within their environment. According to Moll (2000), from a sociocultural perspective, individuals living together in a society are the foundation for all mental and personal development. It is important to look inside a classroom to observe the unique cultural communities that are developing within.

Attitudes and beliefs also play a significant role in shaping classroom environments. Implementing literacy education that enables and nurtures distinct cultural identities implies a change in the way students are educated (Perez, 1998). According to Perez, the "social organization of the classroom needs to be flexible enough to allow children to engage in literacy activities within diverse social situations and for distinct social purposes" (p. 257). Providing students with opportunities to explore texts through drama increases their opportunities to share their cultural experiences and identities through collaboration.

Creating an environment where students can express themselves and their different perspectives is challenging. Delpit (1995) believes that "one of the most difficult tasks we face as human beings is communicating meaning across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power" (p. 66). Using drama in the classroom helps to break down these lines as students begin to explore the real issues in a text from different perspectives, and they have the opportunity to express those different perspectives. Teachers should strive to create classroom communities where

conventions, purposes, knowledge, and power are negotiated (Dyson, 2000). Building classroom communities that facilitate a negotiation process, require building and reinforcing an environment where different perspectives are respected. According to Maxine Green (1994), teachers should strive to create classrooms that are:

1. Reflective and just.
2. Pulsate with a plurality of conceptions of what it is to be human and fully alive.
3. Full of the sounds of articulate young people, with ongoing dialogues involving as many as possible, opening to each other, opening to the world.
4. Where students care for one another and we learn to care for them.
5. Where friendships are achieved, a wide-awakeness is encouraged, and there is a renewed consciousness of possibility.

A strong classroom community is not necessarily something that can be seen upon entering a classroom. A real community will flourish when voices are brought together, and the hearts and souls of the students and teacher that inhabit them (Miller, 2002). In order to be successful at exploring texts through drama, it is essential that students learn how to listen and respond to each other in thoughtful and respectful ways. When attempting to build a community in the classroom, is also important that students become engage in the process of exploring texts through drama.

2.4 BUILDING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DRAMA

In order to facilitate successful learning experiences, it is important to understand the role engagement plays in a student's learning process and the conditions that are

necessary for engagement to occur. For the purposes of this literature review, engagement is defined by a student's willingness to seek to understand, question comments or ideas, work cooperatively with other students in small and whole group settings, and consider multiple perspectives. Short and Burke (1991) suggest that it is the student's questions that motivate the learning process, not questions posed by someone else. For engagement to occur, students must feel some ownership in their learning experiences.

The most productive work takes place when individuals are engaged in meaningful and relatively complex projects, which take place over time, are engaging and motivational, and lead to the development of understanding and skill (Gardner, 1993). Therefore, classroom instruction should be designed to engage students in reading, writing, and speaking activities. By exploring texts through drama, students have opportunities to express their perspectives and understandings of text in meaningful and multiple ways. It is especially important to point out that through drama, students have opportunities to respond to text on a continual basis, instead of at the end of the text. They are responding to what is happening in the text as it is happening, instead of summarizing the meaning of the text once they have finished reading it.

As mentioned earlier, classrooms are social communities, and what better way to foster learning than to have students engage in learning together through drama. The classroom learning environment plays an important role in student engagement. For engagement to occur, the environment needs to have elements of effective instruction, support, and inspiration (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to reflect

upon teaching practices and the classroom environment in order to determine how it does or does not contribute to students' engagement in learning. Ruddell and Unrau (2004) suggest twelve guidelines that should be applied to a learning environment to promote engagement and long-term literacy acquisition:

1. Provide for the exploration of student identity, its roots, and its possibilities; acknowledge that each student has self-schemata that shape behavior and warrant understanding; devise activities and interactions that bolster reflection and self-discovery.
2. Design an environment that intentionally builds student self-worth rather than one that unintentionally threatens it.
3. Promote a climate in which students work toward task-oriented goals that foster a sense of mastery and competency.
4. Develop an atmosphere in which students see that the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and strategies is incremental and proceeds through efforts that become increasingly self-regulated.
5. Activate and extend students' background knowledge to facilitate meaning construction.
6. Model reflectivity and metacognitive processes for students.
7. Design tasks that are perceived as important to students, which involve real-life issues, which have subjective and community-related interest, that are seen as useful in relation to students' future goals, and that provide the chance for the experience of flow.

8. Establish literacy expectations that are appropriate to each student's capacities and provide support for the attainment of those expectations.
9. Encourage the flexibility to view experience from multiple perspectives and to adopt instructional stances that promote literacy engagement; encourage, when appropriate, an aesthetic stance in response to reading in order to engage more of the experiential self and its narrative imagery.
10. Discover and use students' sociocultural values and beliefs as resources for constructing an environment that reflects students' orientations while developing understanding of and tolerance for alternative value and belief systems.
11. Allow students to gain a sense of ownership and share authority in the interpretation of texts and criteria for validation of those interpretations.
12. Formulate or select tasks that are suitable to students' task-engagement resources and that allow students to internalize knowledge and skills to become increasingly independent, self-regulating, and self-reliant learners.

These guidelines are designed to improve teaching practices, and to foster cooperative and engaging learning environments. Through increased engagement in exploring texts through drama, students will create rich textual understanding and an appreciation for others' perspectives. Students will also be more likely to engage in their own learning when they have multiple ways to present their learning.

Kornfeld and Leyden (2005) discovered through their research on literature and drama, that the students were totally immersed in their productions throughout the semester because they were the creators, designers, and implementers of every aspect of

each production. When students take ownership in their learning, they are more likely to be engaged in establishing and achieving goals. Drama allows students to take charge of their learning and places decision-making in their hands (Heathcote, 1995). The classroom learning environment created by the teacher and students, has a significant impact on a student's motivation to engage in literacy activities and learning.

2.5 MULTIPLE LITERACIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Drama brings together multiple ways to communicate ideas and perspectives. Communicating ideas and perspectives in multiple ways is sometimes referred to as "multiple literacies". Piazza (1999) defines multiple literacies as the "complex amalgam of communicative channels, symbols, forms, and meanings inherent in oral and written language (verbal and nonverbal) as well as the visual arts, music, dance, theater, and film (including television, video, and technology)" (p. 2). Exploring texts through multiple literacies provides students with multiple ways to present their understanding and perspectives on a text.

Gallas (1994) discovered through her own research in the classroom, that developing a multi-arts curriculum allowed her to follow the children's own expressive interests while also using the artistic process as an integral part of the identification and expansion of their knowledge in different areas. By using a strategy similar to Gallas', a teacher is able to integrate multiple literacies in the classroom as a way to produce and express meaning, instead of just adding art activities as curriculum extras. Multiple literacies play a significant role in providing students with multiple learning experiences.

Howard Gardner's (1999) work on multiple intelligences reinforces the concept of using multiple literacies in the classroom, because they both focus on the belief that there are many different ways to teach and learn. Gardner believes that fostering multiple representations is one component of effective teaching, and providing many opportunities for performances reveals to the student and to others the extent to which the material has been mastered. Gardner points out that intelligence is not a singular phenomenon; he concluded that there are at least eight intelligences that everyone seems to possess to some degree:

1. *Linguistic Intelligence* – Involves sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals.
2. *Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence* – The potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body to solve problems or create products.
3. *Spatial Intelligence* – The potential to recognize and manipulate the patterns of wide space as well as patterns of more confined areas.
4. *Musical Intelligence* – Involves skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns.
5. *Logical-Mathematical Intelligence* – The capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically.
6. *Intrapersonal Intelligence* – The capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself, including one's own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life.

7. *Interpersonal Intelligence* – A person's capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others.
8. *Naturalist Intelligence* – Expertise in the recognition and classification of the numerous species of his or her environment, and extensive knowledge of the living world.

It seems reasonable to support multiple intelligences and multiple literacies in the classroom, so students have opportunities to explore areas they feel they have strengths in. Essentially, exploring literature through drama provides opportunities for students to imagine and create through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences.

One benefit of exploring multiple literacies through drama is that it provides classroom experiences that are motivating, engaging, and worthwhile. Students will begin to choose multiple literacies that appeal to their interests. Some students may choose to work on costume design, script writing, acting, or technology. Drama offers many possibilities for students to work together to present, organize, and perform stories, for example, writing a script, creating scenery and set designs, making costumes and props, and presenting to an audience (Piazza, 1999). Getting students to engage in classroom drama will depend heavily on discovering each student's area of interest and building on those interests.

Encouraging students to engage in their learning will also depend on the ability to create an environment where students feel safe to explore their interests and take risks. Participating in drama activities can increase students' motivation for reading, boost

students' self-esteem and confidence, and provide opportunities for meaningful student collaborations and social interactions (Richards & Goldberg, 2003). Integrating multiple forms of literacy into the curriculum will benefit students' learning, critical thinking, collaboration with others, and motivation.

2.6 A SPACE TO LEARN THROUGH PLAY

With so much pressure on teachers to prepare students for standardized tests and meeting educational standards, there is little time during the day for teachers to incorporate learning through play. This is especially true for students in the intermediate grades; it is a common misconception that students in the higher grade-levels do not need time to participate in playful learning. However, students in the intermediate grades need a space to build social networks with peers, and explore and express their thoughts in a safe environment. Having students explore texts through drama creates a space where students can develop initiative, confidence, express themselves, and take risks.

For the purposes of this study and literature review, the notion of space is defined by Victor Turner's concept of liminal space, which is when participants experience or play with different ways of behaving; where people shed their ascribed roles or identities and experiment with a new range of expression in a different social reality (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Characteristics of a liminal space include freedom of expression, a non-institutionalized space, and an opportunity to explore and reinvent identity. When teachers create a space where students can break away from the normal school day routines, students are free to be themselves or be someone else through role-playing.

Playing a role in a fictional world creates an opportunity for students to be someone else, which allows them to explore, practice, experiment with, and extend their awareness of self and the world around them (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Providing students with opportunities to explore literature through drama is an excellent way to create role-playing experiences.

Exploring literature through drama creates a collaborative environment through which play and learning are brought together. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Turner (1997) refer to these productive spaces for learning as the third space. Their perspective on third space is framed by hybridity theory, which asserts that people within a community draw on multiple resources or funds to make sense of the world (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). Within this third space, play and learning occurs in a space in-between the home and traditional classroom. In the third space, students participate in a playful, collaborative, learning environment where they begin to see connections between their knowledge of the world and others' knowledge of the world.

Within a classroom community, all students have unique experiences and identities, and it is essential that they feel what they have to say is valid. Freire (1987) talks about literacy as the "language of possibility", because it enables learners to recognize and understand their voices within a multitude of discourses in which they must deal. Freire also believes that "all of us ultimately speak the same language (in the abstract sense) and express ourselves in different ways" (p.53). Literacy instruction

needs to occur in an environment where there is access to multiple discourses and all voices can be heard.

Drama provides an environment where students can explore texts and express their thoughts freely, and experience different voices through role-playing. Freire suggests that voice requires struggle and understanding of both its possibilities and limitations, and that the most educators can do is to create structures that would enable submerged voices to emerge. Role-playing is one way in which students that may have felt “silenced” can express themselves in a non-threatening environment. Role-playing becomes a vehicle through which they can express themselves without the fear of totally exposing themselves, because essentially they are just “playing”.

Through role-playing, everyone is provided the opportunity to become a learner. As learners, students and teachers deepen their understandings when they come together to dialogue, share ideas, and form opinions; working with each other builds a community (Kauffman, 1996). It is important that students and teachers view themselves as learners if they want to create a strong sense of community in the classroom, and create an environment where students feel safe expressing themselves. In a collaborative community, both teachers and students openly live as learners and make their learning available to others (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). Students need to understand that even teachers are continually learning, and that both students and teachers have knowledge to share.

Building on this idea of creating a safe learning environment, Perez (1998) strongly encourages teachers to create a classroom context where children can take risks

in reading, writing, and problem solving, and offer their own ideas and theories about text. This means that the classroom environment must support creative thinking and multiple perspectives. A study done by Moller and Allen (2000), found that students struggling with reading, writing, and discussions could benefit from a “response development zone” where multidimensional learning occurs. The students in this study learned that they had something to say and that people would listen. They also learned that having time to participate in small group discussions eventually helped them feel comfortable discussing difficult topics, such as poverty and racial discrimination.

Wolf (1998) discovered through her study on classroom theater, that the children’s plans and performances were not an artificial exercise because they had extended opportunities to think, talk, move, draw, plan, and perform. Exploring texts through drama allows students to take on roles of readers, writers, actors, negotiators, designers, and even the characters that they play. Heath (1990) believes that the power of role shifting, framing ourselves in play, and using the new voices acquired through becoming actors seems to provide a host of abilities and full performances of knowing; More than might be discovered through the ordinary classroom requests for displays of knowledge.

Getting students to openly discuss their opinions and ideas can be a challenge for teachers. Keene and Zimmermann (1997) encourage teachers to discover ways in which they can create more open discussion opportunities for children, opportunities for children to question, defend, rethink, and ultimately draw conclusions about the essence in a given text. Engaging with texts through drama provides opportunities for children to

determine important dialogue and details that should be included in a performance, comprehend the meaning of a text, and practice vocal expression. Teachers who regularly make time for drama in the classroom support basic reading, writing, and oral language skills by opening up several communicative channels for exploring the concept of story (Piazza, 1999). Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that the connection between drama and reading can be a powerful reminder of possibilities, for it invites us to establish new connections among students' textual experiences and the social and imaginative worlds students create together.

When exploring literature it is important to create a drama context that has the following features: (a) It helps students get "inside" the story, (b) it is open-ended in that the context is not overly prescribed so that participants in this framed drama can contribute to the story or world that is created, and (c) and it has certain tensions or an unpredictability associated with drama (Tierney & Readence, 2000). Students need to feel that they have some ownership in their learning and feel that they are in a safe environment where they can share their perspectives and learning without fear of being rejected. Heathcote (1995) uses the term "the mantle of an expert" to suggest that students need to be in an environment where they can function as an expert. Through drama, all students adopt important roles, roles that build upon each other and require collaboration.

Incorporating drama into the classroom is not only about building an environment of collaboration, it is also about bringing new voices to an audience, about publishing others' words in performance (Wolf, 1997). It is about bringing voices to those students

that may be silenced or reluctant to share their perspectives with others. Through drama, students' ideas are given a platform or stage that enables them to test their voices through perspectives and situations that are quite unlike the ones they encounter in a typical classroom context (Wolf, Edmiston, & Enciso, 1987). Exploring literature through drama creates collaborative experiences where students' knowledge, experiences, voices, and reflections combine to create a community of learners.

Within the framework of sociocultural theory, play provides an environment for natural learning to occur (Wertsch, 1998). As students respond to a text through drama they are creating an imaginary world, which can serve as a tool for learning. Drama creates a learning process in which students create imaginary worlds that are metaphors to link their personal experiences with the unknown, or outer, social world (Henry, 2000). It is important to recognize that drama contributes to learning not as the ability to memorize lines, but rather as an exploration of life, which is experiential and existential (Heathcote, 1984). The imaginations of students are continually operating under the surface of daily classroom life, and they have a significant impact on the classroom community and student learning (Gallas, 2003). Students need a safe learning space where they can be creative and express their imaginations in multiple ways.

2.7 SUMMARY

The benefits of exploring literature through drama are numerous and can be achieved through large and small-scale activities. Teachers may hesitate to incorporate drama in the classroom for a variety of reasons including, lack of time and training or

pressure to prepare students for standardized testing. However, it is critical that teachers move past these barriers and realize that exploring literature through drama can be done in many different ways. Providing teachers with a framework for using drama in the classroom will hopefully encourage them to use it in multiple ways and for multiple purposes.

The theoretical framework of this literature review supports the concepts of transmediation, sociocultural learning, student engagement, multiple literacies, and liminal space, as they apply to using drama to explore literature. All of these concepts work together through drama to create a rich learning environment for students. As students engage in transmediation across multiple sign systems, they are encouraged to think creatively and share their perspectives with others. They can express their perspectives and understandings through multiple literacies, individually or within a group. As students participate in all of these learning processes, they are doing it in an environment that supports playful learning and the freedom to express who they are.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 AN INVESTIGATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This study seeks to explore the experiences of twenty-seven, culturally diverse, sixth-grade students as they attempt to share and construct meaning from a selected text, and then work collaboratively to create a movie of the text. Unlike most studies on drama in the classroom, this study will examine the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and the influence this has on student engagement. This study has drawn from the concept of multiple literacies and how it applies to the extension of communication choices beyond that of just language. It includes drama, film, video, computer technology, visual arts, and music. Social learning plays a critical role in multiple literacies instruction, because students are encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with other students.

The structure of this study is based on the following assumptions: (a) Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies will have a positive influence on student engagement, (b) when students socially construct meaning there are opportunities for them to consider multiple perspectives, and (c) learning becomes authentic and meaningful when a space is created in the classroom for playful experiences. This study is also centered in sociocultural theory (Au & Raphael, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Moll, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), the central tenet of which describes human thought as constituted by and originating from language-based social interactions with others. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is more than just passively receiving information

and responding to it; learning and language are inextricably tied to the sociocultural context. Which is why it is so important that educators improve their understanding about the behaviors, needs, and attitudes of their students.

The research question this study sought to answer was “How can drama be used to help students create meaning together through shared experiences and consider different perspectives?” This question was formulated with the following sub-questions in mind:

- (1) How do students benefit from the use of multiple literacies in drama related activities?
- (2) What is the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and student engagement?
- (3) How does the creation of a “third space” help engage students in creative exploration?

All of these questions were the primary focus as I began an in-depth analysis of observations, field notes, interview transcripts, and journal entries. Table 1 outlines the logic behind the underlying assumptions and research questions just mentioned. It also provides an outline for data gathering and analysis.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH LOGIC MODEL

This table shows the logic behind the underlying assumptions, research questions, data collection, and analysis.

Questions	Assumptions	Activities	Outputs	Data Collection Systems	Short/Long Term Outcomes
How can drama be used to help students create meaning together through shared experiences and consider different perspectives?	Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies will have a positive influence on student engagement.	Students read the text, <i>Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest</i> (1968)	Documented observations of twenty-seven sixth-grade students (participants)	Transcribed and analyzed interviews	Short Term Students create and share meaning through multiple sign systems
How do students benefit from the use of multiple literacies in drama related activities?		Students watch Robin Hood movies	Audio and video documentation of observations	Analyzed field notes	
What is the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and student engagement?	When students socially construct meaning there are opportunities for them to consider multiple perspectives.	Students select roles for their movie	Audio recorded interviews with individual participants after completion of movie	Analyzed fieldwork journal	Students build relationships with other students through cooperation and collaboration
How does the creation of a third space help engage students in creative exploration?	Learning becomes authentic and meaningful when a space is created in the classroom for playful experiences.	Students write a script for their own Robin Hood movie based on the book and movies	Audio recorded interviews with focus group participants after completion of movie	Documented and coded emerging themes	Students become engaged and take ownership in their work
		Students create story boards for main scenes	Audio recorded interviews with focus group participants after completion of movie	Coded field notes, interviews, and fieldwork journal into categories according to emerging themes	Students explore multiple literacies and select tasks that appeal to them
		Students design and build sets, props, and costumes	Researcher's fieldwork journal entries	Coded field notes, interviews, and fieldwork journal into sub-categories according to emerging themes	Classroom is transformed into a third space where students can play and imagine
		Teacher and students begin filming scenes			Long Term Improved teacher practice by exploring literature through drama
		Teacher and students edit the movie			Improved teacher practice through support of the social and cultural practices of the classroom learning environment
		Completed movie shared with school			

3.2 CHOOSING A RESEARCH MODEL

In order to choose an appropriate research model, it was important for me to select one that would allow me to immerse myself into the culture of the classroom without being intrusive. My methodological framework would need to be flexible enough that I could collect data through a variety of qualitative methods. I also wanted to select a means of qualitative research that would allow both participation and observation within the classroom setting. Based on all these requirements, I determined that a case study that incorporated a qualitative and ethnographic approach would be the most appropriate. The goal of the case study was to collect, analyze, and reflect on as much data as possible using the following methods:

- (1) Participant Observation
- (2) Field Notes of Classroom Experiences
- (3) Audio and Video Documentation
- (4) Individual Interviews
- (5) Focus Group Interviews
- (6) Fieldwork Journal Entries
- (7) External Audit (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001)

Since I knew many of the participants in this study, I had to decide how closely I would work with them. As a participant observer, I assumed the role of an “inside” observer who could actually engage in activities with the students (Creswell, 2005). Taking on this role allowed me to collect data through in-depth observations and listening, while still allowing me the opportunity to interact with the students.

Creswell (2005) describes three popular observational roles: “the participant observer (someone that takes part in activities in the setting they observe), the nonparticipant observer (someone that visits a site and takes notes without becoming involved with participants), and the changing observational role (someone that adapts their role to meet the needs of the situation)” (p. 212). I had already worked with the participants in this study on other classroom projects, so it was very unlikely that I would be able to enter the research site without having contact with the participants. However, some days I found myself playing more of the role of observer than participant. If I noticed certain behaviors or events that I really wanted to observe more closely, I would focus on just observing that day. Observation can be one of the best techniques when an activity or event can be observed firsthand or when a fresh perspective is desired (Merriam, 2002). Carolyn Frank (1999) suggests that in order to understand what is really going on in classrooms, researchers need to observe from an ethnographic perspective and observe from the angle of vision of the members of the classroom. While observing the students, it was critical that I look at the classroom from the perspective of the students if I wanted to fully understand what was going on in this sixth-grade classroom.

Being well known by the participants had both advantages and disadvantages. Knowing the participants as well as I did gave me access to information that a stranger would not have had. I was also very familiar with the classroom environment and structures that had been put in place since the beginning of the school year. However, it also meant that I was very close to the participants and events around me, and sometimes

it was a challenge to maintain a professional stance when it came to my interpretations of the events going on around me.

3.3 CASE STUDY DESIGN

John Creswell (2005) defines an ethnographic case study as a case analysis of a person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective. For the purposes of this study, I chose to examine multiple cases in one classroom community to gain insight into specific issues. Stake (1995) refers to this process as a collective case study. The cases were purposefully selected based on what I wanted to learn and how significant that knowledge might be for extending theory and/or improving practice (Merriam, 2002). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), planning a case study not only involves selecting a research question, but also incorporating design components that can contribute to theory, practice, policy, or social issues and action.

Throughout this process I was continually reminded of Stake (2000) who wrote, “Perhaps the simplest rule for method in qualitative casework is this: Place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on. The brain work is observational, but more basically, it is reflective” (p. 445). I specifically chose case study research, because it afforded me the freedom to be continually reflective on what I was observing and hearing. I was allowed the opportunity to be on site for extended periods of time and have personal contact with the participants of the study.

The case selection for this study was not difficult to identify, because I had worked with this teacher and students for the past two years on similar movie projects.

The difficulty came when I had to choose which students and events to observe more closely. I discovered that the more time I spent in the classroom, the more aware I became that certain students and events stood out as opportunities to explore the questions I had. These participants and events would more than likely provide knowledge and information about the phenomena I was investigating (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

3.4 ETHNOGRAPHY

A significant goal for this study was to collect data that would give me an in-depth look at the behaviors and events going on in this particular classroom. Merriam (2002) believes that ethnography is not defined by how data is collected, but more importantly by the lens through which the data is interpreted. It was important to examine what the participants were doing, how they were behaving, and how they were interacting with others. It was also important to describe what was being learned in a descriptive way that would guide the reader through the experiences of the participants. I wanted to bring the reader into the world of the participants in the same way that I had been.

Creswell (2005) suggests that an ethnography can be conducted whenever you have a culture-sharing group to study, which includes one that has been together for some time and has developed shared values, beliefs, and language. For this study, the culture-sharing group would include the students and teacher in this particular sixth-grade classroom. I needed to collect detailed records of their behaviors and conversations as

they worked together to create their movie. Having prolonged interaction with the participants on a daily basis, allowed me to have a better understanding of their beliefs, motivations, and behaviors (Wolcott, 1999).

Barbara Tedlock (2000) suggests, “Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context. It is not simply the production of new information or research data, but rather the way in which such information or data are transformed into written or visual form” (p. 455). I agree that it is not enough to just collect the data. The data that is collected must be reported in such a way that the participants’ personal experiences can be shared with intended audiences.

Frank (1999) cautions anyone conducting research to realize that reality can be seen from many different perspectives, which means that students can see events in the classroom one way, teachers another, and ethnographers a third way. The data does not always provide one quick answer, which is why it is critical to look at it from multiple perspectives and through multiple data collection methods. According to Spradley (1979), an ethnographer seeks out ordinary people with ordinary knowledge and builds on their common experiences, and eventually through interviews, repeated explanations, and the use of special questions, ordinary people become excellent informants. If we think about it, we meet potential informants every day. My goal as an ethnographer in this classroom was to observe and listen carefully to what my informants were telling me.

3.5 SITE SELECTION

Since I had already worked with Mr. Wesley on previous movie projects, the site selection process was fairly easy. He fully supported my request to do research in his classroom, so the next step would be to get approval from the Institutional Review Board for the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. I submitted applications to conduct research to both organizations, and by mid-January I had received permission to conduct research in Mr. Wesley's classroom. The next step was to inform the students and their parents/guardians of my intent to conduct research in the classroom. I sent a letter home with the students that provided background information on myself, my research topics, and how I would be collecting information. Attached to the letter were two consent forms, one for the parents/guardians and one for the student. I did not begin conducting research in the classroom until I had received consent forms from all parents/guardians and students. I received consent from all parents/guardians and students, which meant that no one had to be excluded from the research.

I had already established a relationship with the participants in this study, because I had been in the classroom several times before as a classroom helper. However, it was my job as a researcher to maintain their trust and confidentiality throughout the data collection process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). When I entered the classroom in early February 2005, I entered as a researcher, which was a very different role than that of a classroom helper. I began to look at everything through a different lens. As I sat

documenting what I was seeing and hearing, I wondered if the students were seeing me through a different lens as well.

The classroom had not changed from the previous month when I was there for a class Christmas party, but now it looked different through the lens of a researcher. I noticed the desks placed in six groups of four, the blue velvet curtains that hung from the ceiling in the reading area (which was used for several drama activities), the wooden puppet stage that was bright red and blue with red curtains, students' artwork was hanging from a clothes line stretched across the ceiling, a video cart sat in the back of the room with several different pieces of equipment on it, there were two older computers in the front of the room and next to that was shelves full of books, and in the front of the room hung a large blue fabric that almost stretched the length of the wall. This blue fabric is called "blue screen" and it is used during filming, so that background scenes can be added during the computer editing process. I noticed a poster on the front chalkboard that displayed the "classroom rules", which I know was created by the students the first week of school, but I had never really looked at it that closely before. I thought about how powerful that poster was because the students collectively created it. All of the things that I had never given much notice now had new meaning because I was looking at them through the lens of a researcher.

3.6 PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted in a sixth-grade classroom (approximate age group 11-12 years old) at an elementary school with approximately 550 students across grade levels Kindergarten through Sixth-Grade (K-6). The class consisted of twenty-seven students from culturally and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. A majority of the students were Caucasian, one student was African-American, and four students were Alaska Native. Approximately 56% of the students were female and 44% were male.

The teacher in this study was male (for the purposes of this study will be known as Mr. Wesley), was in his mid-thirties, and at the time of this study had been teaching for approximately 11 years at the same school. He has taught sixth-grade for five consecutive years, and has also taught second, third, and fifth-grade. This was his third year doing movie projects with his sixth-graders, and he has been very committed to making the process a memorable learning experience for his students. He is constantly looking for new ideas and ways to incorporate multiple forms of literacy into the classroom.

The participants in this study had not done a drama project this extensive before, primarily because Mr. Wesley is the only teacher in the building, and one of very few in the school district, that is having students explore texts through making movies. Even though the students were unfamiliar with the movie-making process, they were familiar with the end product because they had watched the movies that were created by previous classes. Part of the overall sixth-grade movie project involves sharing the movie with the

whole school once it is completed. Therefore, many of the participants in this study had the opportunity to watch the movies when they were in fourth- and fifth-grade.

My initial observations of the students documented that they seemed to have trouble getting along. I observed that they had an enormous amount of difficulty coming to an agreement on anything. Mr. Wesley expressed concerns about doing the movie project with this class, because they really struggled when it came to working collaboratively with each other. His previous two classes worked well together from the beginning, and it seemed obvious that the dynamics of this group of students was very different. Despite his hesitation, he was curious to see the results of the case study and was excited to have the study conducted in his classroom.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Some serious considerations needed to be made about how data was going to be collected for this study. What methods could I use that would be versatile and diverse enough that I could accurately document what I was seeing and hearing in the classroom? How could I ensure that I would be able to thoroughly triangulate the data that was collected? What data collection methods should I use so that my observations of the teacher and students' behaviors and voices would be heard? I realized that the data would need to be collected through multiple quantitative methods that would help me understand the social setting that I wanted to study (Janesick, 2000).

Besides needing multiple methods of collecting data, I needed to make sure that the data I was collecting was valid and reliable. All interviews and observations were

recorded on video and/or audiotapes. I made sure that the data I collected was analyzed daily, which helped me answer existing questions and pose future ones. Audio and videotapes were transcribed and provided written documentation, field notes also provided written documentation, and the fieldwork journal allowed me to reflect on what I observed and explore further questions.

3.8 OBSERVATIONS

Classroom observations were conducted five days a week, two hours a day, for approximately ten weeks during the spring of 2005. Most observations were done in the morning, however some days I would continue to observe if the drama activities spilled over into the afternoon. My observation duties primarily consisted of sitting on the sidelines and documenting what I was seeing and hearing. Some days, I would help the students with their lines, help with costumes, or help with prop design. As a participant observer, I assumed the role of an “inside” observer that actually engaged in activities in the classroom (Creswell, 2005).

As a participant and observer, I was very dedicated to taking thorough field notes of what was going on in the classroom. At the end of the day, I went back through my field notes and made additional notes about what other thoughts and observations I had at that specific time. Some researchers prefer to take notes on a computer or transfer their notes to a typed document, however, I preferred to write my field notes because it felt more personalized. I also had to write my field notes because the video camera that was being used to make the movie would pick-up the sounds of my typing. I sometimes find

that a laptop can be distracting and intimidating to some subjects that are being observed. In fact, many students did come up to me during my observations to ask me about what I was writing.

3.9 FIELD NOTES

Even before I entered the classroom, I knew I was going to attempt to document as many observations as I could. I wanted to make sure that I captured the rich context of the classroom and the distinct behaviors and characteristics of the students. I realized very quickly how hard it was to document everything that I saw and heard. It was helpful to have the video tape going during the times that I was in the room, because it allowed me to go back to certain observations that I felt I needed to review.

According to Spradley (1979), there are several different kinds of field notes that make up an ethnographic record: a condensed version, expanded account, fieldwork journal, and analysis and interpretation. I divided my field notebook into three sections by drawing lines from the top of the page to the bottom. In the first section I recorded the date and time of my observations, the middle section was where I recorded my observations while I was in the classroom, and the third section was where I recorded certain phrases that I heard while I was observing. The purpose for writing down the times as I observed was so that I could go back to that specific time on the videotape if I needed to clarify something that was heard or observed. At the end of my observation session, I went back to the first section of the field notebook and expanded on what I had observed or heard.

My field notes became a very important part of my research process, because they closely connected me to the participants and helped me see things from their perspective. McCall (2000) talks about how ethnographers use their field notes to create a “script” for readers. I began to realize that my field notes would soon tell the story of my experiences in this particular classroom. The participants in my study would soon become the characters in my story, and their behaviors and activities would soon become the scenes.

3.10 FIELDWORK JOURNAL

Spradley (1979) defines the fieldwork journal as a diary that contains a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork. This was probably one of the most significant data collection methods for me, because it allowed me to reflect on my thoughts, feelings, frustrations, questions, researcher biases, and much more. I found myself making entries at several different times of day: (a) Shortly after my time in the classroom, (b) late in the afternoon, and (c) in the evening when I finally had time to reflect. Many times, questions that I had the day before guided my observations the next day. My journal became a safe place for me document personal feelings about my progress through the research process.

3.11 INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the sixth-grade movie project, after the movie had been shown to the whole school. They took place during lunch and recess time, so as not to interrupt the students’ class time. Each interview was recorded

with an audio recorder and transcribed. Individual interviews were conducted with three of the main characters, Robin Hood, Lady Cuning, and Maid Marian. Focus group interviews were conducted with supporting cast members: the King and his supporting cast, Robin Hood's supporting cast, and the prop and stagehand managers.

It was only through transcribing the audio-recorded interviews that I realized how valuable the participants' voices were to my research. Silverman (2000) says that talk is sometimes seen as trivial, however it has increasingly become recognized as the primary medium through which social interaction takes place. My social interactions with the participants during the interviews were very open and sensitive to their verbal and non-verbal feedback. I was continually aware of how I asked the interview questions, how they responded to the questions, and the length of the interview time. The individual and focus group interviews gave me a deeper understanding of the students' interpretations and feelings toward the movie making process.

There were seven interview questions that I asked the students in this study. At times during the interviews, I found that I had to repeat or rephrase a question, but for the most part I kept the interview process very flexible. The key interview questions for this study were:

1. Did the process of making this movie give you a better understanding of the book compared to just reading the book? Why?
2. What parts of making the movie helped you understand the characters in the book?

3. How did reading the book and watching the movie help you in writing the script for the movie?
4. In what ways did working on this movie influence your relationships or attitudes toward other students?
5. Tell me how you accepted or didn't accept other students' ideas about the story, characters, or making the movie? Why?
6. What aspect of the project did you feel was your strongest? What aspect didn't you feel as comfortable with?
7. Tell me about which part of making this movie made you want to participate in the project?

Tape recording the interviews helped to ensure completeness of the verbal interactions of the participants and provided material for reliability checks (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). I also took handwritten notes during the interviews, however they were not as detailed as I would have liked. I felt that taking notes sometimes distracted me from giving the students my full attention, and I sensed that they appreciated me having continuous eye contact with them. I wanted the students to feel relaxed and comfortable, so they would speak honestly about their experiences during the movie making process.

3.12 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was an ongoing process from the very first day. It did not take me long to figure out the volume of data that I would be collecting. I realized very quickly that I would need to review my field notes and journal responses continually in order to

avoid feeling overwhelmed. A slow and steady approach was going to be the key to making sense out of all the data I was collecting.

The method of data analysis that I chose to use for this study was constructivist grounded theory. Kathy Charmaz (2000) suggests that a constructivist approach to grounded theory reaffirms studying people in their natural settings and that social reality does not exist independent of human action. Charmaz (2000) also believes that:

A constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the “discovered” reality arises from interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. Researcher and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it. (pp. 523-524)

I identified with this theory of analysis because I felt that I was part of the research process, and what I observed determined how and what I would analyze. As I went through my field notes, fieldwork journal, video and audiotapes, and interview transcripts certain categories began to emerge. Once I identified several categories, I then went back through the data and began to code the data according to which category it fit best with. I used the constant comparative procedure to develop categories, which eventually provided me with subcategories of data. Creswell (2005) defines constant comparison as “an inductive data analysis procedure in grounded theory research of generating and connecting categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories” (p. 406). Having identified the subcategories and categories, I was then ready to look for themes or patterns in the data.

The final analysis step involved taking the data and arranging it in an organizational flow chart, see Figure 2, which linked subcategories to categories, and then categories to themes. Categorizing the data this way allowed me to determine what information I wanted to include in the research findings section.

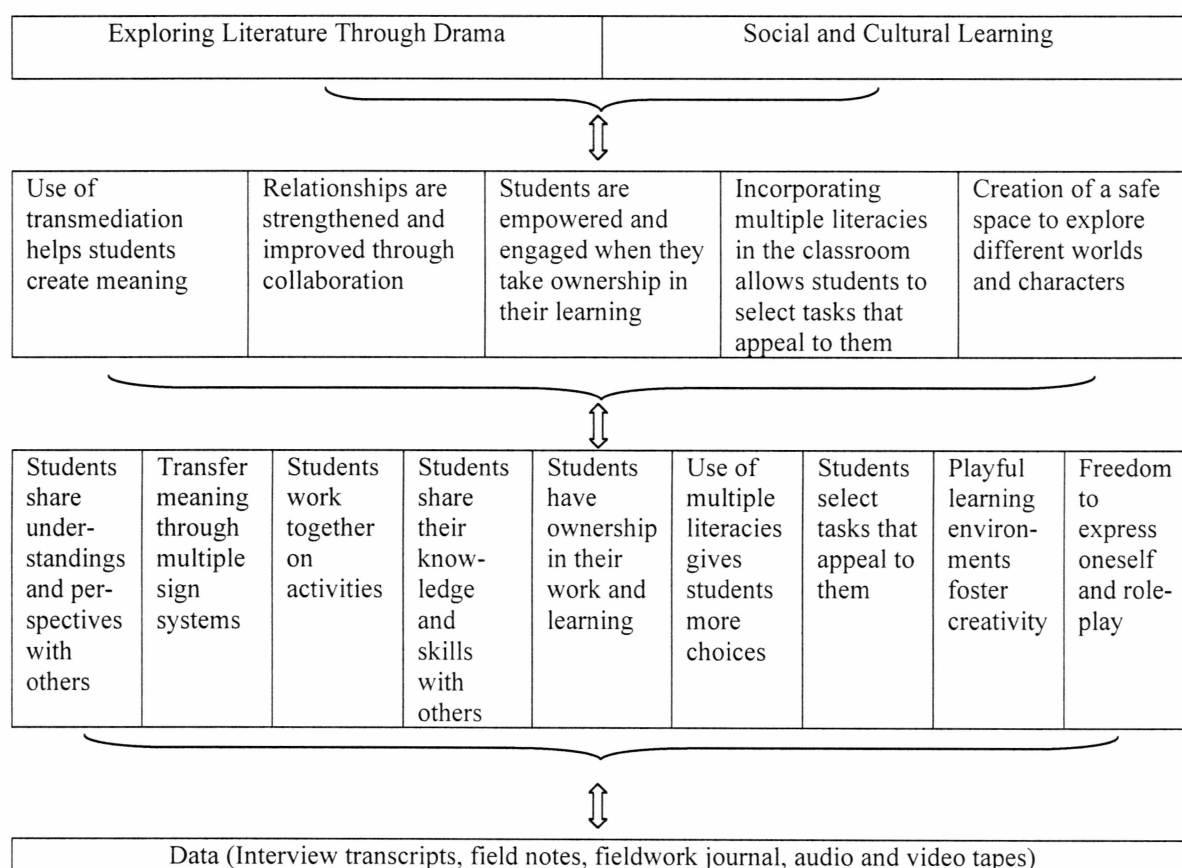


FIGURE 2: CONSTANT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Organizational flow chart of data, which links subcategories to categories, and categories to themes.

3.13 DATA REPORTING

How I wanted to present my data findings was something that I really gave serious consideration to. I knew I wanted to provide the reader with a written narrative that gave a rich description of the participants' journey through the movie making process. I also knew that I wanted to include participant dialogue, quotes from interviews, and observations of individuals in the written narrative. Figures would also be used to show connections between themes.

3.14 ENHANCING VALIDITY

Making sure that my findings and interpretations were accurate was an important consideration throughout the entire data collection and analysis process. In order to validate findings, I incorporated Creswell's (2005) suggested strategies such as triangulation and external audits. I was able to triangulate among different data sources by collecting data from a variety of individuals (teacher and students), types of data (field notes, fieldwork journal, interviews, audio and videotapes), and methods of data collection (documents and interviews). The members of my graduate review committee served as external auditors on my research. They were individuals that were outside of the research, yet still reviewed different aspects of my research on a regular basis.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, will provide a narrative look at research findings. I attempt to provide an extensive look at the participants' experiences, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes as they progressed through the movie making process.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.1 SETTING THE STAGE

Weeks before I entered the classroom to begin my research, questions flooded my mind. Would I be accepted in the classroom or be seen as an intruder? Would I find the answers to my research questions? How would I share what I learned with others? I had spent time in this classroom and was very familiar with the students, but entering the classroom as a researcher would be a different role for me. I knew this experience would be a challenge, but I looked forward to the journey and all the discoveries that would come along the way.

The day I entered the classroom to begin my research journey, I saw the same faces that I had seen so many times before, but this time I would begin to look at the stories behind the faces. I knew their voices and behaviors would tell a story, I just was not sure what that story would be. Would their story answer my questions regarding (a) using drama in the classroom to help students create meaning together through shared experiences and consider different perspectives, (b) how students benefit from the use of multiple literacies in drama related activities, and (c) the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and student engagement? I also had to consider the fact that my questions may not be answered at all, and that I might discover something that I had not expected to find.

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 2002) guided my ongoing analysis of the behaviors that were being observed and the voices that

were being heard. As I began to analyze and code data that I was collecting, certain categories and sub-categories surfaced. These categories and subcategories were then analyzed thoroughly, and organized into the following themes, which will be discussed in-depth throughout the chapter:

- The use of transmediation (taking understandings created in one sign system and moving them into another sign system) across multiple sign systems helps students create meaning.
- Relationships between students are strengthened and improved through collaboration and cooperation.
- Students are empowered and engaged when they take ownership in their work.
- Incorporating multiple literacies in the classroom allows students to select tasks that appeal to them.
- Through drama, the classroom is transformed into a third space where students feel safe to explore different worlds and characters, and they can play in an environment free from judgment.

In order to understand how these themes emerged, it is critical that I share the voices and observations of the students (all names are pseudonyms) and Mr. Wesley. I will also share my journal responses, because they provide detailed insight into my reflections on what was occurring in the classroom and the processes I was going through as a researcher. This strategy is sometimes referred to as “reflexivity”, which is the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, so the reader may have a better understanding of the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

4.2 READING, WATCHING, WRITING, AND ACTING

By the time I entered the classroom to conduct research, the students had already participated in the following activities:

- Read the book, *Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest* (1968) as a class,
- Watched the movie, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938),
- Watched the cartoon movie, *Robin Hood* (1973),
- Selected which characters they would include in the movie,
- Had tryouts and a ballot vote on who would play the characters in the movie,
- Created story boards for the main scenes in the movie,
- Began writing the script for their Robin Hood movie based on student input, as well as, sections from the book and movies that they wanted to include.

I had worked with this class on previous activities and projects, and it was not uncommon for them to explore a text through multiple sign systems to create meaning, for example, oral and written presentations, visual arts, music, dance, drama, and movies. They would often read multiple versions of a text and then watch movies of the text, followed by a whole class or small group discussions about the differences and similarities. When I talk about students creating meaning by transmediating across multiple sign systems, I am referring to the way in which students take what they understand as they read and talk about literature and transform these understandings by expressing their ideas in a variety of ways such as through play, drama, music, or writing (Semali, 2002). From a semiotic point of view, a sign may take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects (Chandler, 2002).

As I watched the students write and edit the script, design scenes, create props and costumes, add sound effects and music to their movie, edit the scenes on the computer, and act, I realized that they were sharing their knowledge and perspectives through multiple signs. I began to wonder if making this movie gave them a better understanding of the book compared to just reading the book. This became my first interview question, “Did the process of making this movie give you a better understanding of the book compared to just reading the book, and if so, why?” The following are some of the responses I received from the students:

Kevin: It helped because there, like, you had different points of views and stuff. Like when we zoomed more on, like, the Sheriff on one thing, and more on Robin in another. So it kinda showed two different points of view.

Liz: Well, I think it was better because you could kinda see what was happening. Like, if you couldn't exactly picture how like some things were going in the book, you could just see it more in the movie.

Beth: There are so many different versions of Robin Hood, so not only did it like help us understand, but it kind of helped the viewers understand that this is like our version.

Erin: Yeah, this is like our version. This is how we think of Robin Hood. So, this is how we think the story should go.

Sam: Yeah, because we were able to actually act it out.

Suzy: Yeah, it helped me make more sense of the book because we were taking some lines from the book and different movies of Robin Hood, and making it more understandable.

Vance: Yeah, because I understand things better when I see it and be part of it.

Lisa: Yeah, I like being able to do the movie because there could be a part in the book that was confusing, but when you break it down and do it, and can actually see it, it makes sense.

The students seemed to be in agreement that reading the *Robin Hood* book, watching the movies, writing the script, and acting out the story helped them understand the book more than just reading the book alone. Comments such as, “showed two different points of view”, “helps us understand”, and “understand things better when I see it and be part of it”, suggest that using the book and movies helped the students create meaning and share their perspectives with others. Beth and Erin said that the book and movies helped create “our version” or “how we think the story should go”, which suggests that the students worked together to construct shared meaning. According to Vygotsky (1978), meaning is socially negotiated and mediated through multiple sign systems.

Through my observations it was apparent that the students were exploring the *Robin Hood* story through reading, writing, video, and acting, however I wondered if there were certain parts of making the movie that helped the students understand the characters more. This was my next interview question, “What parts of making the movie helped you understand the characters in the book?” The following are the some of the students’ comments:

Kevin: Uh, writing the script helped, because you had to think about what you would say if you were them, and that helped.

Christy: I think making the scripts, because Mr. Wesley would have us make the scripts and put in the parts, and when you make the scripts you get to understand them more and you get to make what they say and stuff. So you kinda got to make it up, but you still had to go with the stories.

Liz: Writing my lines. Then I kind of got to see what I was going to do, I wasn't just reading something, I actually wrote it.

David: You got to personally feel what they felt when you were saying the lines and acting like that person.

Heather: If you're reading a book, then you really don't know the point of view, but if you're actually playing the character, then you actually have to work with it and act it. It's like fun and kind of hard at the same time.

Beth: My character was a guy, so I had to try to experience being a guy character, but, so I had to tweak it a little. But I think it was kind of fun to experience it through a movie, because you got to feel like, you get to be like who the character is.

It was through the students' comments that I learned how significant writing the script and acting was to them understanding their character. They made comments such as, "writing the script helped", "when you get to make the scripts you get to understand them more", and "you got to personally feel what they felt", which seemed to suggest that by writing their own lines they developed a better understanding of who their character was.

Heather and Beth said that “actually playing the character” and being able to “feel like” the character helped them see the character’s point of view. Writing the script and acting served as sign systems through which the students expressed their understanding of the characters.

Writing the script was not an easy task for the students, which lead me to my third interview question, “How did reading the book and watching the movies help you in writing the script for the movie?” The following are the students’ responses to this interview question:

- Kevin: Cause you see it so many times and then you really understand what’s going on a lot more. So you know what’s happening in the movies and the book, and then you know what to do when you’re making the movie.
- Liz: We used pieces of what it (her character) was like in the movies, but we kind of mixed them all together, so I got to see all the different ways she (her character) could be played.
- Vance: We had more choices of what to do. Like with the, we did the, the archery tournament kinda like with both of them.
- Lisa: You could, like, combine them all together to make one choice.
- Mike: Yeah, like, Prince John, I got the attitude from the real version (the Robin Hood movie) and didn’t really pay attention to the cartoon.
- Vance: And in the book the Sheriff didn’t have many parts, but in our movie we put them all together, and I had a lot more parts than I thought I would.

Beth: When I was writing my lines, I started to watch the movie and started writing my lines, and then I went over to the book and I kind of compared lines out of the movie and the book, so it was kind of helpful to have both of them.

Sam: The movies and reading the book actually gave you different ways, to, of how it sounded better. You could actually take a part from the book and add it into this, and from the movie, and add it into your script. It just made it more fun and made it funnier.

There seemed to be consensus amongst the students that using the book and the movies really helped them write the script for their movie, because they “had more choices” and could “combine them (choices) all together” to make their own version based on their understandings. The students were able to draw meaning by comparing the book and the movies side by side, for example, when Beth said “I kind of compared lines out of the movie and the book, so it was kind of helpful to have both of them.” They were constructing meaning intertextually, which means making connections with one or more texts in order to construct meaning of new texts (Semali, 2002).

The students in this class are no different from the students in many other classes across the country. They come to school with extensive knowledge about movies, books, video games, cartoons, the Internet, and so on. It was not uncommon to see the students and even Mr. Wesley incorporate this knowledge into their movie:

Kevin and Chris want to use an idea from the movie, *Matrix* (1999), for their staff scene. They want to swing their staffs around their waist and fight with them, but

they want to make it look really fast. Mr. Wesley tells them that they can film the scene in slow motion and then speed it up when they do the editing on the computer. It is difficult for Kevin and Chris to spin their staffs around their waists slowly. At one point Kevin says, “That was cheeseball”. Mr. Wesley suggests that they do the scene in smaller segments, and after many retakes, they finally get the scene done. (Field Notes, February 23)

It was really interesting to see the students make reference to a movie that they had seen and want to incorporate a piece of that into their movie. This was a very natural connection for the students, and Mr. Wesley acknowledge the connection and supported them in using it. Putney, Green, Dixon, Duran, and Yeager (2000) suggest “by exploring the intertextual ties across contexts, both verbal and nonverbal, we can identify what members bring from prior events and how participating in those prior events is socially relevant and significant” (p. 93). Once Kevin and Chris made the suggestion to use an idea from the *Matrix* movie, other students in the class made the same connection to the movie and agreed that it was a great idea. This happened several other times during the process of filming:

Several of the students decide to make a spoof off the movie, *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997). In their movie when they talk about the ransom being 1 million dollars, they decide to have Mike put his pinky finger to his mouth, just like the bad guy does in the Austin Powers movie. It is very cool how they made that connection and incorporated it. (Field Notes, February 21)

The students are working on the script to include a line from the movie, *The Sandlot* (1993). They are planning on using the line when the character says, F-O-R-E-V-E-R, really slow and the camera zooms in on his mouth. The Sheriff will say, “Put him in the dungeon for F-O-R-E-V-E-R. He will say it really slow and the camera will zoom in on his mouth. The students can’t stop laughing; they’re pretty excited about adding this. (Field Notes, March 22)

Kevin is working on a cool back flip scene, but several of the students are wondering how to include some cool sound effects with the flip. Mr. Wesley makes reference to the movie, *Troy* (2004), and how he has a special effects disc that shows how they make all the cool sound effects. He says, “We can do all those cool sounds too.” (Field Notes, February 18)

Some teachers may hesitate to encourage students to make intertextual connections to movies they have seen, when really this is what the students know best. What they see on television, movies, and video games are what they connect to on a daily basis. Mr. Wesley recognized these connections and supported the students’ decision to include them in their movie. According to Chang (2002), “Play and art make this intertextual reality for children come alive, especially when we consider the connection and interaction between internal and external worlds of the individual, the function of expression, the involvement of imagination and invention, the interweaving of narratives, the use of symbols for meaning-construction, representation, and communication” (p. 54). The students’ internal connections to other movies became external when they discussed their connections and how they could include them in their movie.

There seemed to be an agreement amongst the students that reading the *Robin Hood* book and watching the *Robin Hood* movies helped them “understand” the story better and provided “different points of view”. They appreciated having “choices” when it came to creating their “own version” of *Robin Hood*. Participating in “writing the script” and “actually playing the character” helped the students understand the characters better. Finally, the students’ ability to connect with movies they were familiar with such as, *Matrix*, *Austin Powers*, *Sandlot*, and *Troy*, helped them bring new meaning to their own movie.

As I progressed through analyzing my research data, I began to make my own connections, especially when I started looking at relationships between the students. It was clear to me that they were using multiple forms of text to create meaning and share their perspectives, but how did they respond to perspectives that were different from their own? This question guided my analysis as I began to look at the relationships that were developing between the students.

4.3 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COLLABORATION

This study is centered in sociocultural theory (Au & Raphael, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Moll, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), and guided my analysis of the social and cultural setting of the classroom. I have helped Mr. Wesley with similar movie projects for the past two years, so I am very familiar with the collaborative process that occurs between the students. Even before I began doing research with this class, I knew they were very different from the previous two classes. There were ongoing disagreements

amongst the group, and there were six boys in particular that always seemed to be disruptive no matter what the situation. Even before I began my research, I was worried about what my data would show.

Wertsch (1998) contends that the difficulty of understanding social settings, such as the classroom, comes from the inability to view the setting in all its complexity. It was obvious that there were some complex situations going on in this classroom. I am reminded of a conversation that I had with Mr. Wesley after a rough day of filming:

Four of the usual suspects were off task again today. What amazes me is how focused they can be when it is time to shoot their scenes. I was really hoping to see their behavior off-screen improve by now. I talked to Mr. Wesley about this and he said that this group of students, and a majority of the whole fifth-grade class that moved up to sixth-grade this year, caused so many problems for the fifth-grade teachers last year. Many of them were constantly in the principal's office and parents were being called on a regular basis. There are two other sixth-grade teachers at this school, and according to Mr. Wesley, both of them have reported similar behavior problems this year. (Fieldwork Journal, April 1)

What is interesting about this observation is that the students were off-task, but then on-task when needed. They could have been motivated to be on-task due to peer pressure or because they wanted to take pride in their work. Regardless of the reason, it was evident that this group of students was a challenge to keep on-task when they were not in front of the camera. As I went through the process of coding my data, it was not uncommon for me to find comments in my field notes such as:

Some problems when I initially came in the room today, some students were misbehaving. Mr. Wesley seems less patient and a little irritated. (Field Notes, February 8)

Working on the big castle scene, there are thirteen actors in the scene and they seem very confused and are disagreeing on how to shoot the scene. (Field Notes, February 9)

The castle scene is not ready for filming and everyone is just standing around talking. It seems that a week off from school didn't help. (Field Notes, March 21)

Having past experiences with similar movie projects, I knew there would have to be full participation by all students if they were going to pull it off. There were many points during my research journey when I wondered if they would be able to accomplish the huge task that lay before them. As I continued to analyze my field notes and fieldwork journal, I discovered many instances where students were working together and sharing experiences:

It is interesting how the whole group cheers when a scene is completed. I think they're realizing that this is more difficult than they thought it would be. They seem to be more aware of what it takes to get a scene done, and they're starting to reprimand each other when a student makes a noise and messes up a scene. The guilty party is more likely to pay attention when they get looks or verbal remarks from their fellow classmates. (Fieldwork Journal, February 8)

Some of the students are totally off task as others get ready for the next scene, but once “quiet on the set” is called by Chris, they all pull together and straighten-up. (Field Notes, March 9)

I am beginning to see relationships that have formed that weren't there in the beginning of this project. There is also less bickering between the students. Mr. Wesley said that this class is so different from his previous classes that did this movie project, and he wonders if maybe this class needs this project even more to pull them together. (Fieldwork Journal, March 28)

One of the most interesting observations was how easily distracted and off task some of the boys would be right before filming. Many times, I would observe them sword fighting or spinning staffs right before their parts. As soon as someone called “quiet on the set” these same boys were where they were supposed to be and ready to go with their lines memorized. The fact that they took the time to memorize their lines and were focused when they needed to be, proved to me that they really took pride in their work and were committed to doing a good job on the movie.

Once I started analyzing the students' interviews, I began to see evidence that they were not only committed to the movie, but also to each other. The students' comments provided a lot of insight into the relationships that developed as a result of this project:

Kevin: It just felt like a good time hanging out with kids in your class. Me and Tom didn't hangout much before the movie, but towards the end of it we

hung out more together. And Chris too, because he had a part that was with mine, so we ended up writing scripts a lot together.

Christy: Well, with some people they're (relationships) exactly the same, but with some other people I learned a little bit more about them, and I was a little bit more open to different people.

Becky: I got to know a couple of people, um, Emily and Janet. I got to know them real well, became friends, and had a fun time.

Mike: Me and Vance got to, well, me and him were already friends before it began, but we actually started to learn more about each other and we actually started to have more fun together, started hanging out, started talking about stuff.

Heather: Yeah, when Mike first moved here I didn't like him at all. Then actually we learned about each other and we actually became friends.

Beth: I definitely think it was a fun experience being able to cooperate with all our classmates, even the ones we didn't like.

Emily: Yeah, and you got closer to people that you really didn't like at the beginning of the year.

Sam: One person, I didn't know her very well, and I didn't know how she would act in the movie, but I saw her act in the movie and she had great acting skills. And also, watching the others helped me to learn.

Stacy: When I came to this classroom it was kind of different to me. So when we did the movie, I, there was some interesting relationships with acting

because sometimes it was all laughing and fun, sometimes it was kind of grouchy cause you wanted to get it done, because the lights made it really hot and stuff, and, but it was interesting when I came because it was, I didn't realize I was going to do something fun when I changed.

Suzy: It sorta helped me with making a friendship with people. Well, see with this one person I didn't really like cause of something she did last year, and so, since we were doing a part that was close together, it helped us to become friends.

This sixth-grade movie project gave students the opportunity to work together with other students over an extended period of time. It also put them in a position to work with students that they may not have normally chose to work with. Many of the students mentioned that they got to know someone better than they did before the movie project. I went on to ask the students how they accepted or did not accept other students' ideas about the story, characters, or making the movie. Here are their responses to this interview question:

Vance: Yeah, it was hard. Like I had a really corny line that someone made up and I didn't really like it, and I said no, can we please change it, but it actually turned out pretty cool.

Mike: Yeah, Vance, in the beginning they wanted him to be a little chicken and he didn't like that, and he thought it was really corny and everything, so, he changed his attitude and everything.

- Erin: You have to work with them, and talk to them, and exchange lines, and exchange scenes, and stuff, you have to work together. You have to talk about the scene with everybody.
- David: You can see how they interpret things differently from you, you can see their point of view more. So, then, more than you would have because some people in our class didn't really talk.
- Beth: When you're making a movie you have to be in a group with all these people that you don't really talk to that much, and then you have to listen to them and you have to include their ideas and stuff.
- Suzy: Well, to me it was a little easy but then a little hard because, like, sometimes when you're trying to talk to some people and they won't listen and then somebody else butts in, and it's just, that part would be hard. But then it's like everybody comes up with different ideas and you just choose the best one.

At the beginning of this research journey, I worried about the students' ability to accept each other's ideas because they disagreed on so many things. However, as they progressed through the movie making process, they seemed to realize that they would have to work together and that each of them really did have something valuable to add. The students were deepening their understandings when they came together to dialogue, share ideas, and form opinions, essentially they were working with each other to build a community (Kauffman, 1996). When I returned to the classroom in early May to watch

the first draft of the movie with the students, it was evident that this group of students had become a community:

I went back to the classroom today to watch the first showing of the completed movie with the students. They were sprawled out on the floor eating pizza and cupcakes. There were some minor adjustments that needed to be made to the sound, but that didn't stop the students from laughing and having fun watching each other on the big screen. After all these weeks of hard work, it is so nice to see the hard work pay off for them. The students seemed very proud of their work; that all the hard work was worth it. It was nice to see them laughing with each other verses laughing at each other. They reminisced about things that were happening in the particular scenes. It was good that they had a chance to watch it together as a class first, because they had so many inside stories and jokes. I realized today how far this class has come from four months ago. They're a community that appreciates and supports each other. I don't doubt that they will have future bumps in the road, but I feel more confident that they will handle them as a group in a respectful and caring way. This project impacted all of them to some degree, and I am confident that it will be something that they will remember. (Fieldwork Journal, May 3)

My early observations described the students as being "off task", "misbehaving", and "disagreeing on how to shoot the scene". However, as time went on my observations began to describe the students as "cheering when a scene is completed", "relationships have formed", and there seemed to be "less bickering". Student comments such as, "fun

experience”, “became friends”, and “learned about each other” seemed to support the fact that they were building relationships. When asked about how they handled accepting other students’ ideas, the students said “it was hard”, “you have to work together”, and “everybody comes up with different ideas and you just choose the best one”. It was encouraging to hear the students say that accepting other students’ ideas is hard, but that it is important to work together. Being respectful of others’ ideas and points of view plays a critical role in building a classroom community.

This sixth-grade movie project created an opportunity for students to accept multiple perspectives, make compromises, participate in whole group and individual decisions, appreciate differences and similarities, and create caring friendships. The data analysis provided evidence that the students were socially constructing knowledge and thus becoming a community of learners. The next step in the analysis process was to determine what conditions were present in the classroom that made the students want to engage in making the movie.

4.4 ENGAGED AND EMPOWERED

This analysis section focuses on the role engagement played in the students’ learning process and the conditions that were necessary for engagement to occur. For the purposes of this research, engagement is defined by a student’s willingness to understand, question others’ comments or ideas, work cooperatively in small and whole group settings, and consider multiple perspectives. According to Howard Gardner (1993), the most productive work takes place when individuals engage in meaningful and relatively

complex projects, which take place over time, are engaging and motivational, and lead to the development of understanding and skill.

Classrooms are social communities, and what better way to foster learning than to have students engage in learning together through collaborative activities. The classroom environment plays an important role in student engagement and learning. In order for engagement to occur, students need to feel supported, encouraged, and inspired. As I analyzed data that I had collected, I began to see all of these elements present in the classroom:

Mr. Wesley is giving a lot of direction on acting and line suggestions. The students are looking to him for direction and support. (Field Notes, February 7)

Mr. Wesley is letting the students take over the camera. Now that the students are running the camera, they call for “quiet on the set”. They are having more control over the project and understand how important cooperation is. (Field Notes, February 7)

Students are beginning to set-up the scenes without direction. They know what the scene requires as far as props, costumes, and so on. It is nice to see them take ownership in the process. (Field Notes, February 16)

It’s interesting to see Mr. Wesley guiding them through the script that the students wrote. A lot of times they are telling him how they see the scene or what a certain line should be. Mr. Wesley says, “You’re not going to add the lines about dressing up like a lady?” Kevin replies, “No”, and Chris says, “Yeah, we don’t need to say that.” (Field Notes, February 16)

When the students don't like a line or how a scene is going, the students are the first to say so or initiate changes. They really have a vision of how they want things to look and don't look to Mr. Wesley for advice on how the scene should go or what should be changed. (Fieldwork Journal, March 3)

The data began to show that the students were gaining a sense of ownership in their movie and becoming more self-regulating. I discovered many examples of where the students were actually directing and supporting each other, which provides evidence that they were engaged in the process of making this movie:

The class agrees that the first take was better and they decide to shoot the scene again. One student says, "Try not to laugh this time David". The whole group adds, "Yeah!" (Field Notes, February 7)

Kevin and Chris finally get the scene after several tries, many snickers, and tongue twisters. They know it is good as soon as it is over. They're getting better at recognizing a good take and a bad take. Kevin jokingly adds, "Yeah! I'll be in my trailer!" (Field Notes, February 22)

Stephen and Kevin are not sure about this next scene. They question Mr. Wesley about it and he encourages them to try it. Stephen says, "We really can't do this, it's not going to work." They decide to try the scene another way and it works out great. (Field Notes, March 3)

Chris is still filming today. He is trying to get the students to be quiet. Chris says, "Come on you guys. Quiet on the set!" (Field Notes, March 9)

Amazing transformation in the room when the students take over the camera and shooting the scenes. They are in charge of scene placement and the movement of actors. Mr. Wesley is really taking a backseat in the process, he only assists when needed. (Field Notes, March 10)

It was encouraging to see the students select tasks that were engaging to them. As they worked on tasks of their choosing, it was obvious that they became increasingly independent and self-reliant. Mr. Wesley was very good at recognizing when a student was engaged in a particular activity and he took advantage of those instances of engagement. The following observation provides evidence that he recognized engagement in one student and because of this he gave the student ownership in the specific task.

Students are working on the set design for the carriage and rewriting lines for the next scene. Mr. Wesley is facilitating the groups as they work, and moving from group to group. Vance comes up with the idea to make the reading corner into the inside of the carriage, and to pan the camera from inside the carriage scene to outside the carriage scene. Mr. Wesley instructs Vance to take the lead on creating the inside of the carriage, since he is visualizing it. Vance picks a few helpers and gives direction on how he is seeing the carriage. Vance is a very good leader and does a great job at giving constructive feedback to his helpers. (Field Notes, March 22)

Experiences such as this one provide examples of an environment that builds on students' self-esteem and promotes engagement. According to Ruddell and Unrau (2004), we can

expect students to engage with reading and interact in the classroom community if they are motivated to read and to learn, if prior knowledge is activated, if tasks are personally relevant, and if they are encouraged to actively construct meanings. Field note observations such as, “nice to see them take ownership in the process”, “set-up scenes without direction”, and “they really have a vision of how they want things to look” showed a classroom environment in which students were encouraged to participate in their own learning, share ownership in the learning process, and fully engage in literacy experiences. According to field note observations, there was an “amazing transformation in the room when the students took over the camera and shooting the scenes”, which suggests that giving students ownership in the process is key factor in increasing student engagement. Getting the students to engage in all of the activities necessary to make their movie, depended heavily on discovering each student’s areas of interest, and then building on those interests.

4.5 MULTIPLE LITERACIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Working on the *Robin Hood* movie provided the students with multiple ways to communicate ideas and perspectives. It also provided them with a great way to explore multiple literacies in the classroom. Multiple literacies in this movie project included (a) reading and discussing the *Robin Hood* book and movies, (b) writing the script, (c) creating props, costumes, and sets, (d) acting, (e) filming and directing, (f) working with music and sound effects, (g) conducting research on the Internet, and (h) editing the movie on the computer. Piazza (1999) suggests that we think about multiple literacies as

multimodal forms of representation or mixed varieties of meaning making, shaped and presented in different ways. My observations provided data which indicated that incorporating multiple literacies in the classroom, allows students to select tasks and create meaning in a way that appeals to them. For the purposes of this data analysis, I focused my observations on three students that seemed to really benefit from having the opportunity to select tasks that revealed their strengths:

Chris

Chris can't help but narrate from the back of the room while Mr. Wesley is filming. He always has a comment or question about how the scene is being filmed. A few of his comments today were, "Why isn't there real water in the glasses?", "Becky, put your script down.", and "Mr. Wesley, aren't you supposed to be shooting from different angles?" (Field Notes, February 10)

I wonder if he will eventually take over the camera? He will definitely be a challenge. I asked Mr. Wesley about Chris, and he said that he is typically pretty negative about everything they're doing in class and when he does get his work done, he becomes a distraction for others. (Fieldwork Journal, February 9)

Chris has now entered the movie and seems to be taking his role in the movie seriously. He has his lines memorized and is in character.

(Field Notes, February 22)

Chris does a very cool flip with his staff today during filming of his scene. Kevin says, "That was a sweet move". I actually saw Chris feeding lines to Kevin today during their scene together. I am seeing a lot of hidden talents in Chris.

(Field Notes, February 23)

Chris did all the filming and directing today. It is really amazing to see him take charge of this project. I asked Mr. Wesley why no one else was doing the filming and directing, and he said that no one else really showed an interest. It is so nice to see Chris in this role, because he seems so focused and interested in what he does, and he is really good at it. (Fieldwork Journal, March 10)

Mr. Wesley told me today that the class has been working on making their own movies, some are working in groups and some are working individually. Chris has been working on his own movie, which he is calling, "My Worst Day Ever". He has made his own music for it on a computer program. According to Mr. Wesley, he is really into the project and when he gets his assignments done he goes right into working on it. It sounds like this motivates him to get his assignments done; something Mr. Wesley says he has struggled with before. Mr. Wesley says he has seen pieces of Chris' movie and it is very funny. He also said that Chris is very talented. (Fieldwork Journal, March 21)

Stephen

Stephen has now entered the movie. He has been a challenge on this project, because he tends to be disruptive and has difficulty staying on task. Today he

knew all his lines, the lines of others in his scene, and how the scene was supposed to go. This was a nice surprise. (Fieldwork Journal, March 3)

Stephen makes reference to one of the *Robin Hood* movies to solve a problem with the fishing scene. He knows his lines and the script, he knows what is supposed to happen scenes ahead and wonders how they will fit together.

Stephen corrects Mr. Wesley on what is supposed to happen in this scene. It is nice to see him leading. He does a good job with his scene and seems happy with his work. (Field Notes, March 3)

Stephen knows his lines and it is obvious that he and Kevin have worked on this scene together. Stephen seems to be more comfortable on stage, because he is playing his part more in character with facial expressions and movement. Stephen and Kevin do a really good job shooting this scene and do it in one take.

(Field Notes, March 3)

Stephen is off task again and distracting others. He is so focused when he is acting and involved in the scenes. Maybe he needed to be one of the main characters, so he would be constantly engaged in the process. The students voted on who would be the characters in the movie early on, so it would be difficult to give him a bigger role now. He is a tough one to keep engaged.

(Fieldwork Journal, March 28)

Christy

Christy is playing a mean character in the movie, which is so different because she tends to be very quiet. Kevin and Mr. Wesley have to encourage her to sound

mean and get mad in the scenes. She didn't seem very comfortable doing the fight scene with Kevin today. (Fieldwork Journal, February 18)

Christy is becoming much stronger in her role, more confident and meaner. She always knows her lines and how the scene should play out, and she is not afraid to swing her sword in the fight scenes. (Fieldwork Journal, March 10)

Christy was always so quiet in class, but now her interaction with others in class has increased, she is defiantly more vocal. Mr. Wesley says she has become more vocal and confident in all areas, not just this project. She has played an important role in organizing the scenes and making sure that everyone has their scripts and knows what they're doing in the scene. She is much more directive than she used to be. (Fieldwork Journal, March 29)

Lisa and Christy have become very interested in the editing of the movie clips and making sure that everything goes together. Mr. Wesley was happy to see them take an interest in this process. David and Vance have also been helping with editing, and they all work on it whenever they have free time, lunch, recess, and after they have completed assignments. (Field Notes, April 15)

I found many examples of multiple literacies being utilized during the entire movie making process, which is why it was difficult to focus on just these three students.

However, I felt it was important to show how effective it can be when you allow students to select tasks that appeal to them. All three of these students had hidden talents that were not necessarily present before this sixth-grade movie project. For example, it was encouraging to see Chris go from being off-task and disruptive in class to being "so

focused and interested in what he does” and to see him “take charge” of the filming and directing. Stephen also had difficulty staying on task, but when it came time to film his parts he “knew all his lines” and seemed very “comfortable on stage”. Christy’s talents came through in her ability to “organize scenes” and “edit movie clips to make sure that everything goes together”. At the beginning of this sixth-grade movie project she was very quiet, but through the movie making experience she had “increased interaction with others” and became “more vocal and confident in all areas”. Once their talents were recognized, it became easy for them to build on these talents.

Often, I would come into the classroom and find some students rewriting the next day’s script, some would be working on editing the movie at the video cart, others would be creating props or scenery in the hallway, and some would be practicing their scenes in the front of the room. While some of the students took on the director’s role, others added the much needed creative details, while still others provide stability, decoding expertise, humor, artistic advice, or practical experience about the way things work in the real world (Wolf, Edmiston, & Enciso, 1997). One of the most encouraging activities I observed on a regular basis was students teaching other students, and even Mr. Wesley, how to use multiple forms of literacy in the classroom.

4.6 CREATING A SPACE TO PLAY

There are numerous places throughout my field notes, fieldwork journal, and interviews where the students said that making the *Robin Hood* movie was “fun” or a “good time with their friends”. I also noticed many times in my observations when I

recorded that the students were “off task” and “playing around”. What seemed like their lack of commitment was really their opportunity to express themselves through a playful and collaborative learning environment. It was their chance to become someone else through role-playing, and enter a space free from embarrassment and full of learning opportunities. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Turner (1997) refer to these productive spaces for learning as the “third space”. For the students in this classroom, the third space began the moment they push the desks to the back of the room, hung the “blue screen” from the ceiling, and got into their costumes:

It always amazes me how the room is transformed into a stage. The desks are pushed to the back of the room, the blue screen for filming covers the whole front wall, there are lights positioned on the floor and hanging from the ceiling, students are in costumes and props are placed in front of the blue screen. To an outsider entering the classroom, it might appear as a disaster, but to the students in this classroom it is the world of Robin Hood. The use of the blue screen brings an interesting twist, because the students actually have to imagine what the scene looks like. It won't be until the editing that the background will be included in the movie. (Fieldwork Journal, February 7)

Interesting what happens when you put swords in the boys' hands. They can't help but sword fight with each other. Of course, all the boys want to use a sword in the scene. David says, “Can I use my sword now? Can I pretend to pull it out like this?” (Field Notes, February 7)

The boys are still having problems playing with their swords during takes. They can't help but swing them around and swing at each other. During the scene Kevin says, "Can I whip my sword out?" He has to do the scene in two takes, because he doesn't like the way he pulled out his sword on the first take. (Field Notes, March 9)

I am just looking around the room at all the sets and props made from stuff around the classroom, pretty creative kids. Even the costumes are made with scraps of fabric, or clothes from home that have been modified. (Field Notes, February 21)

I was continually impressed with the students' willingness to perform in front of each other. Maybe it was the "transformation of the classroom into a world of play and imagination that opened the students up to exploring and sharing with each other" (Fieldwork Journal, February 10). They did not seem to worry about what others would think of them, and many times if someone messed up a line it would send hilarious laughter throughout the room:

They're filming the deer scene today. They made the deer out of stuffed brown paper. Kevin is using the deer to knock the guards over. The deer seems to bring a lot of laughter from the class. They decided to make the deer the class mascot and nick-named him "Jethrow". (Field Notes, February 16)

Christy kicks the deer in this scene, and when she does, all the newspaper guts fly out. There is laughter throughout the room as Jethrow flies to pieces. The students continue to laugh as they tape him back together. (Field Notes, February 18)

I'm sensing that the class is coming together more, and they seem to do it a lot through humor. I think they have realized that they all make mistakes, mess-up lines, or start laughing during a scene. (Fieldwork Journal, February 18)

The space that was created in the classroom provided an opportunity for the students to explore roles that may have been out of their comfort zone. During my interview with Christy, I asked her if she enjoyed playing a character that was so different from her, and she said, "Yeah, my friends came up to me after the movie and said I was 'so mean', and I was 'so good'. It made me feel good, because I could be someone else in the movie and then I could just be myself again." (Interview Transcripts, May 11) It may be that playing different roles allows the students to learn more about themselves. According to Vygotsky (1978), the conceptual abilities of children are stretched through play and the use of their imagination, and that play actually leads development.

Creating a classroom atmosphere that supports and encourages play is a wonderful way to build students' self-esteem and confidence. I observed this classroom "transform into a stage" which allowed the students the opportunity to enter the "world of Robin Hood". In this "world of play" the students were encouraged to use their imagination and explore through role-playing. As I continued to observe the class, it seemed that the students were "coming together more" and that "humor" played a significant part in constructing a safe, supportive environment.

4.7 SUMMARY

When I reflect on the categories and subcategories that emerged during my analysis, I am reminded of the amazing journey that the students participated in while making their movie. I observed them create and share meaning through multiple sign systems, build relationships with other students through cooperation and collaboration, become engaged and take ownership in their work, explore multiple literacies and select tasks that appealed to them, and transform the classroom into a third space where they could play and imagine. The students were reading, writing, listening, speaking, acting, and creating because they wanted to, not because they were being made to. Their desire to participate in, and complete their *Robin Hood* movie, was based on their needs and wants.

As my research progressed, it became obvious that the students were exploring different aspects of themselves and the perspectives of others. They were gaining knowledge from each other and continually problem-solving to complete tasks. New relationships were formed and others were strengthened. By the end of my research journey, it was evident that the students had created a collaborative community that reflected respect and an appreciation for multiple perspectives.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This research has focused on the experiences of one sixth-grade classroom as they explored texts through drama activities. The research journey included an ethnographic look at students as they transferred meaning across sign systems, worked collaboratively to complete tasks, engaged in tasks that appealed to them, and had opportunities to role-play in an environment free from embarrassment. This study addressed concepts of transmediation, multiple literacies, student engagement, sociocultural theory, and third space. The structure of the study was based on the following assumptions: (a) Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies will have a positive influence on student engagement, (b) when students socially construct meaning there are opportunities for them to consider multiple perspectives, and (c) learning becomes authentic and meaningful when a space is created in the classroom for playful experiences.

The primary research question of this study was, “How can drama be used to help students create meaning together through shared experiences and consider different perspectives?” This question was supported by the following sub-questions:

1. How do students benefit from the use of multiple literacies in drama related activities?
2. What is the relationship between social construction of meaning through multiple literacies and student engagement?

3. How does the creation of a third space help engage students in creative exploration?

These questions guided my research journey as I observed the students participate in creating their movie.

My search to discover the benefits of exploring texts through drama was informed by Wolf (1998), who discovered through her study on classroom theater that exploring literature through drama allows students to take on roles of readers, writers, actors, negotiators, designers, and even the characters that they play. Additionally, I was influenced by Heath (1990), who believes that the power of role shifting, framing ourselves in play, and using the new voices acquired through becoming actors seems to provide a host of abilities and full performances of knowing, more than might be discovered through the ordinary classroom requests for displays of knowledge. Teachers who regularly make time for drama in the classroom support basic reading, writing, and oral language skills by opening up several communicative channels for exploring the concept of story (Piazza, 1999). Importantly, this study was strongly influenced by Rosenblatt (1978) who argued that the connection between drama and reading can be a powerful reminder of possibilities, for it invites us to establish new connections among students' textual experiences and the social and imaginative worlds students create together.

One of the hopes for this study is that it will have meaningful results that are of value to educators and teachers looking for alternative ways to engage students with texts. Other studies have been done that examine the use of drama in the classroom,

however this study focuses on how one drama project can (a) engage students in transferring meaning in multiple ways, (b) build classroom communities that value different perspectives, (c) allow students to select tasks that appeal to them, and (d) create an environment that encourages students to express and be themselves. It seems that the best way to summarize the findings of this study is to present them in a way that is useful for educators. The following section will address the concepts that were significant to the findings of this study, and recommendations for how these concepts could be applied to exploring texts through drama.

5.2 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The sixth-grade students in this study had very few past experiences with exploring texts through drama. Some of them had participated in small classroom plays, but none had explored texts through a drama project as extensive as making a movie. Their lack of experience and confidence was evident at the beginning of the sixth-grade movie project, but by the end of the movie-making process there was an obvious increase in self-esteem, confidence, and trust in each other. There were several concepts that seemed to contribute to these improvements: (a) Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies, (b) allowing students to select tasks that appealed to them, and (c) collaboratively learning through play.

The first concept of socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies played a significant role in the sixth-grade movie project. The students began their project by selecting and reading the book, *Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest* (1968). They

read and discussed the book in small- and whole-group settings. Then they viewed several different versions of Robin Hood movies, including one cartoon movie. They took their understandings from the book and movies and wrote a script for their own Robin Hood movie. Being able to use the book and movies was something that the students said they enjoyed the most, because they could select examples from both sources for their script. Using multiple forms of literacy became an integral part of their everyday activities as they (a) wrote and edited the script, (b) designed scenes, (c) created props and costumes, (d) acted out the script, (e) added sound effects to their movie, and (f) edited the movie on the computer. Through all these activities, the students were continually collaborating as they referred to the book and movies to construct meaning.

Socially constructing meaning through multiple literacies is an excellent way to provide students with multiple ways to present their understandings and perspectives on a text. It can be done through large-scale projects, such as the one done in this study, or small-scale projects. An example of a small-scale project might be to have students read a text in small groups, watch a movie of the text, write a short script based on the book and movie, and then perform a puppet show of their script. There are countless ways to incorporate multiple literacies into the classroom, the key is to do it in a way that provides multiple forms of expression and lets the students select the way in which they want to construct meaning and present their understandings. Having students work together to construct meaning from a text creates opportunities for students to share their understandings and perspectives.

The second concept of allowing students to select tasks that appeal to them was critical when it came to engaging students in the project. In this study, the classroom environment played an important role in the students' willingness to engage in their own learning. The classroom environment in this study had all the elements that foster engagement: (a) Support, (b) encouragement, (c) inspiration, and (d) ownership in the process and end product. It was evident that the students in this study had ownership in their movie because they (a) directed and supported each other, (b) they did a majority of the filming and editing, and (c) they selected tasks that they had an interest in. When the students worked on tasks of their choosing, it became apparent that they were becoming more independent and willing to share their skills and knowledge with others in the class.

As stated earlier, the classroom environment plays a critical role in student engagement. Teachers must be willing to reflect upon the classroom environment to determine if it is contributing to a student's willingness to engage in learning. The following questions are important to consider when trying to determine if a classroom environment is promoting student engagement: Are students able to select tasks that appeal to their interests and build on their strengths? Are students able to present their understandings and perspectives in multiple ways? Are there opportunities for students to work collaboratively with each other and present their collective learning? Do students have a sense of ownership in their learning and participate in tasks that are meaningful to them? It is important to continually reflect upon questions like these in order to foster engaging learning environments for all students.

The third concept, collaboratively learning through play, was an important concept for the students of this study. Their primary goal for this sixth-grade movie project was to have fun with their peers. There were many places in my field notes where I documented that the students were “off-task” or “playing around”. What seemed like a lack of commitment to me was actually their way of expressing themselves through play and exploring their imagination. Students at this grade-level rarely have opportunities to break away from the normal school-day routines to express themselves freely or be someone else through role-playing. It was during these play times that I observed the students participate in the most significant learning. In this safe space, walls came down and the students were able to really appreciate each other.

If I could only share one finding from this study with teachers, it would be that we do not give our students enough opportunities to be children. Students need to explore their imagination in the open and share their worlds with each other. There is great power in play, it allows students to experiment and extend their understandings of themselves and others. Using drama to explore texts provides endless ways to create a space for students to be creative and express their imaginations in multiple ways. One simple way to foster playful learning would be to hang a long curtain from the ceiling in the classroom and have students do improvisational plays of books they have read. There are numerous ways to incorporate play into the classroom, if teachers and students are willing to take risks and challenge themselves.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study attempted to bring to light the voices, behaviors, and interests of twenty-seven sixth-graders as they explored a text through drama. My research journey with them will never be forgotten and it is my belief that their experiences in this particular classroom will stay with them for a very long time. It is my greatest hope that educators will be encouraged to employ some of the concepts presented in this study in their own classrooms. My biggest fear is that many of the skills and opportunities that the students had in this classroom will not be available to them as they continue on in their education. The activities that the students in this study participated in could be done in any classroom and at any grade level. It just takes a willingness to try something new and to have faith in your students.

This research journey has inspired me to continue to research the benefits of using drama in the classroom. This study has only touched on one approach to using drama in the classroom; there are so many other options out there to explore. Future study in the area of drama and literature might include:

- research into how after-school, literature-based, drama clubs benefit students' reading comprehension.
- an investigation into students exploring texts through making their own movies.
- an examination of different assessment strategies used to evaluate student learning through drama.
- research on how gender-specific roles in literature influence students' participation in drama activities.

Any future research into the benefits of implementing drama in the classroom would enrich educators' knowledge on how to provide multiple ways of learning and teaching. It is my hope that this research will initiate discussion about how teachers can engage their students in exploring and developing a passion for literature.

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